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Choice



SONIC STUNNER

Yamaha's AV amp heavyweight, p54

XBOX GOES 4K!

One S console
is an Ultra HD
Blu-ray bargain

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Revel 5.1 speaker pack
Optoma Full HD projector
Sony hi-res soundbar
PSB Atmos modules
REL S/3 SHO subwoofer
DVDO 4K scaler



FILM & TV

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EDITORIAL TEAM

Editor Mark Craven
mark.craven@homecinemachoice.com

Deputy Editor Anton van Beek
anton.vanbeek@homecinemachoice.com

Art Editor John Rook

CONTRIBUTORS

Steve May, John Archer, Tekura Maeva, Ed Selley,
Jon Thompson, Richard Stevenson, Danny Phillips,
Rik Henderson

Photography Mike Prior, Claire Collins

ADVERTISING

Advertising Sales Executive Sonia Smart
Tel: 07710 394391
E-mail: sonia.smart@hifinews.com

Advertising Sales Executive Simon Dunn
Tel: 01689 869853
E-mail: simon.dunn@hifichoice.co.uk

MARKETING AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

UK: New, Renewals and Enquiries
Tel: 0344 243 9023
E-mail: help@hcc.secureorder.co.uk
USA & CANADA:
Toll Free: 001 866 647 9191
REST OF WORLD: New, Renewals and Enquiries
Tel: +44 (0) 1604 828 748
BACK ISSUES
www.mags-uk.com

MANAGEMENT TEAM

Group Editor Paul Miller, paul.miller@avtechmedia.co.uk

Group Sales Manager Rhona Bolger

Subscriptions Manager Kate Hall

Chief Executive Owen Davies

Chairman Peter Harkness

Published by AVTech Media Ltd

Suite 25, Eden House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF
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Sony's PlayStation 2 is often credited with bringing disc-based movie playback into the mainstream.

And while the follow-up PS3 didn't manage the same feat with Blu-ray, movie studios will be hoping that the new Xbox One S console can have a similar effect regarding that format's Ultra HD successor.

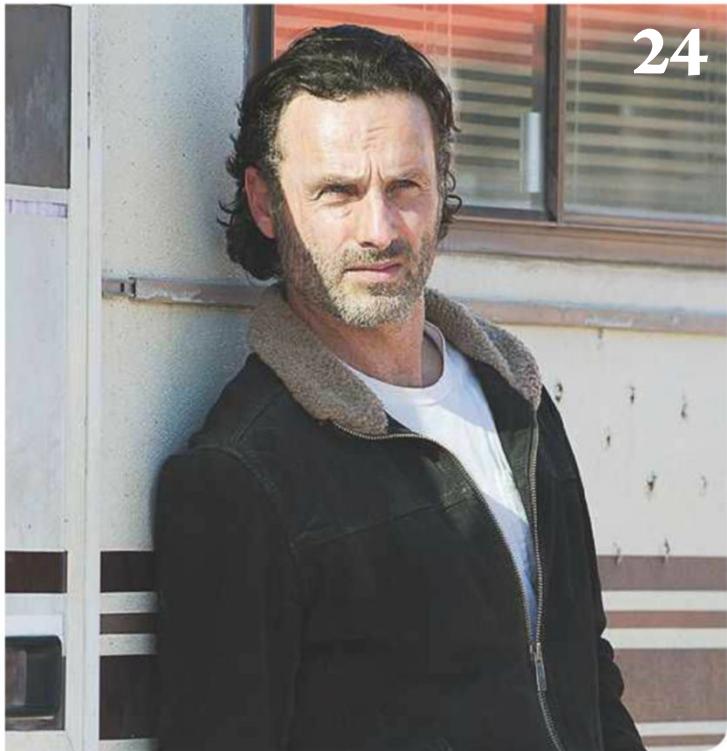


The new One S (reviewed on p58) undercuts standalone players from Panasonic and Samsung in terms of price – and plays games! It could therefore give Ultra HD Blu-ray a reputation boost, and **give 4K TV owners something to cheer if they're bored of hunting around on Netflix for HDR content.** And following hot on its heels will be a toolled-up PlayStation (early name, PlayStation NEO) that should give us even more choice when it comes to 4K. Throw in Sky Q, BT Ultra HD and a rumoured 4K TiVo box and it's clear the next-gen video revolution is truly under way.

Mark Craven
Editor



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CONTRIBUTORS



John Archer:
The UK's most experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early HCC staffer



Jon Thompson:
Film producer and post-production expert delves deep into Hollywood and AV



Steve May:
HCC's former Editor-in-Chief is one of the UK's most respected AV journos



Martin Pipe:
Technical expert Martin is renown throughout the home cinema industry



Richard Stevenson:
Industry veteran and former Editor of UK CE trade journal ERT



Adrian Justins:
Made his name as the editor of *What Video & TV* and *What Home Cinema*

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LG OLED TV 4K



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What the Experts Say



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2015-2016



LG OLEDE6V
MAY 2016



LG OLEDE6V
JUNE 2016



LG EG960V
JUNE 2015



LG EC970V

Model shown E6

BULLETIN

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SKY 4K service to be joined by VR content this year **LOEWE** Debut OLED screens launched
ORBITSOUND Chatting soundbars with Brit audio brand **NEWS X10** The hottest news stories
 in bite-sized chunks **THE ABYSS** James Cameron sci-fi prepares for 4K release & **MORE!**

The art of audio

Artnovion → www.artnovion.co.uk



Acoustic panel specialist Artnovion has created a new line of on-wall treatments designed to provide sonic improvements and a touch of glamour. The 'High-End' collection features absorbers, diffusers and bass traps (including tunable options) in a variety of designs and hues; interested AV-Holics can install the company's Impulso app (for iOS devices), which carries out room measurements and then simulates how the panels could improve acoustics. Pricing varies from around £15-£300 per panel.

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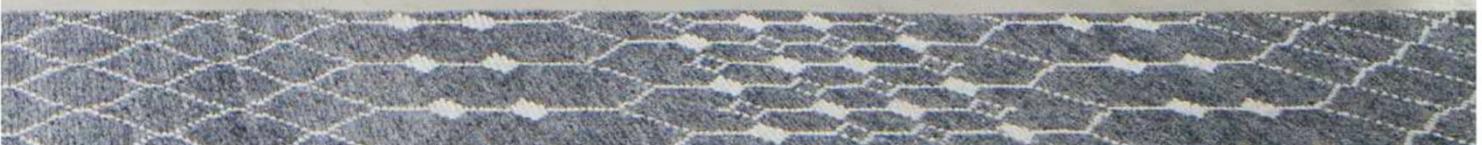
Super-sized Sony

Sony KD100ZD9 → www.sony.co.uk

BELLY LAUGHS

Slapstick sequel
Bad Neighbours 2
raises a smile on
Blu-ray, p97

Nobody could accuse Sony of not thinking big when it comes to its new KD100ZD9 TV, a 100in Ultra HD flatscreen priced at around £60,000. This flagship behemoth employs a new Backlight Master Drive LED structure and debuts an improved 4K image processing engine to deliver the brand's most accomplished Ultra HD HDR visuals to date. And the good news for those tempted is that there are two smaller and more affordable models in the Z series. Turn to p10 for more details and our first impressions.



High-end short-throw PJ



Projection specialist SIM2 has unveiled its first ultra-short-throw projector. The xTV's 0.25:1 throw ratio means

it's capable of projecting a bigscreen image onto a screen or wall from just a few centimetres – a hybrid laser light engine (rated at 2,900 lumens) ensures plenty of ping from the single-chip DLP image. The PJ also manages to cut a striking figure when not in use thanks to a trapezoid chassis and crystal glass top. Distribution in the UK is via Anthem AVS; price is around £14,000. www.anthemavss.co.uk

Fresh air from Orbitsound

New airSOUND soundbar joins Brit company's select product stable

Orbitsound is bolstering its soundbar lineup with the launch of the BAR A60, a £400 model using the company's airSOUND driver/DSP technology. It will be sold exclusively at Currys PC World.

The new soundbar joins the flagship BAR A70, BAR M9 and soundbase and portable speakers in the British company's product line. Measuring a compact 69cm wide and 7.4cm high, the 'bar features five internal drivers – two side-mounted – and is supplied with a subwoofer that connects wirelessly. Connections are pegged at optical digital audio, 3.5mm and Bluetooth.

The BAR A60 launches into a crowded soundbar market, but Orbitsound Managing Director/Product Developer, Daniel Fletcher, isn't concerned. 'I'm not surprised at all by the size of the market,' he told *HCC*. 'A good TV needs a soundbar since TVs are – and sound – so thin. Yes, there is stiff competition, but our own market research has reminded us that as long as we keep communicating our differences from the "norm", we can achieve good sales.'

As for those differences, Fletcher lists British design, the use of wood in construction and airSOUND as key factors. The latter, created by Orbitsound founder Ted Fletcher, promises to eradicate the notion

Budget 'bar adds HDMI



Roth Audio has introduced the third incarnation of its Sub Zero soundbar. The major change with the Sub Zero III

is the addition of two HDMI inputs and one output (with ARC), something not always found on a £150 'bar. Roth has also boosted the rated power output from the 60W of its 2013 predecessor to 90W. But, like that earlier 'bar, the Sub Zero III eschews a separate subwoofer in favouring of partnering its quartet of 2.75in full-range drive units with a pair of passive LF radiators. www.rothaudio.co.uk

Playlist...

Team *HCC* spins up its disc picks of the month

Jaws 3D (All-region BD)

The much-maligned sequel finally reveals its entire *raison d'être* with this stereoscopic Blu-ray release. A real treat for vintage 3D fans!



10 Cloverfield Lane (All-region BD)



This tense and rather claustrophobic thriller packs a surprisingly potent Dolby Atmos soundtrack that really comes into its own during the story's final act.

Concussion (Ultra HD BD)



Sony's strong run of form with the 2160p disc format continues with an exquisite 4K presentation of the hard-hitting Will Smith drama.

Rick & Morty: Season 2 (Region A BD)

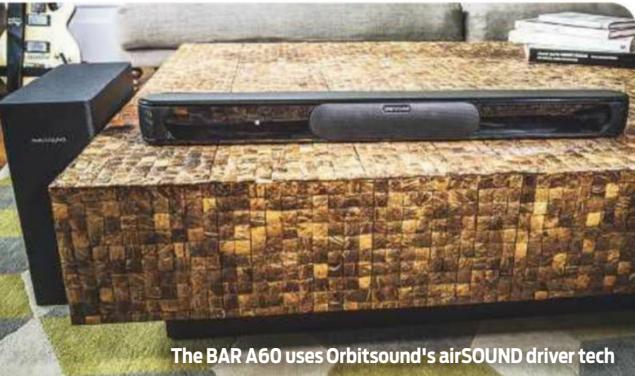


A spectacular second batch of ten episodes for this gut-busting cult cartoon. Roll on Season Three...

Dheepan (Region B BD)



This Palme d'Or-winning French crime drama is one of the most gripping Blu-rays around.



The BAR A60 uses Orbitsound's airSOUND driver tech

At the 'plex...

Heading out to see a flick?
Catch these this month

Ben-Hur 3D

September 7: Before you dismiss it as a remake of the 1959 sword and sandals classic, bear in mind that said Charlton Heston epic was itself a remake of a 1925 silent movie. And the presence of Timur Bekmambetov (*Wanted*) behind the camera should ensure some thrilling chariot races.

Blair Witch

September 16: Originally promoted under a fake title (*The Woods*), this surprise sequel to the iconic 1999 shocker comes from the directing duo responsible for the superb *You're Next* and *The Guest*.

The Magnificent Seven

September 23: Denzel Washington is reunited with *The Equalizer* director Antoine Fuqua for this Western remake. Also along for the ride are Chris Pratt, Ethan Hawke, Vincent D'Onofrio and Byung-hun Lee. Yee-haw!

Sony's OLED killer?

4K Ultra HD ZD9 flatscreen hailed as the 'ultimate' HDR TV

Having stolen the show at this year's CES, Sony is fast-tracking its extraordinary Backlight Master Drive TV to a living room near you. The technology, which delivers exceptional HDR dynamics through a calibrated LED backlight, is at the heart of the brand's new Z series 4K UHD flatscreen.

A new lineup comprises the 65in KD-65ZD9, 75in KD-75ZD9 and 100in KD-100ZD (see p8). Priced at £4,000, £7,000 and £60,000 respectively, the ZD9 is being touted as a possible OLED killer. This is because the high-precision backlight eliminates those light halos around bright objects on dark backgrounds commonly seen on LCD displays. The sets are also capable of exceptional peak brightness, but just how high they glow is under wraps for now.

The CES prototype Backlight Master Drive was said to offer 4,000 nits through 1,000 zones of control. But with the ZD9, Sony is keeping mum. 'We are not announcing the actual brightness or how many zones of backlighting control,' General manager for TV Motoi Kawamura told *HCC*. When pushed, Sony conceded the new models would deliver 'over 1,000 nits.' He also confirmed that Sony would still not be seeking UHD Premium certification for the new TV. 'That is our policy,' Motoi said.

Brighter images

HCC had an early hands-on session with the ZD9 and can confirm it looks significantly brighter than any rival HDR TVs released so far this year.

The Backlight Master Drive features an undisclosed number of calibrated white LED lights, driven by a proprietary lighting algorithm. As the

**Sony's new X1 Extreme image processor debuts on the ZD9**

design focuses the LED light into a tight spot, the effect is less diffusion and brighter images. Significantly, the new range does not support Dolby Vision. It's HDR 10-compatible only.

In addition to its inherent brightness, the

ZD9 incorporates a new image processor, the X1 Extreme, said to be 40 per cent more powerful than the brand's original 4K X1 silicon. This has enabled new features, such as object-based HDR remastering, dual database processing to reduce noise, plus a 4K HDR iteration of Super Bit Mapping, which employs 14-bit signal processing for greater colour gradation.

Object-based HDR remastering looks particularly effective. It takes SDR footage and gives it a scene-by-scene HDR-style makeover. Comparisons of SDR content upscaled to near-HDR appeared remarkable. Bright whites, from material to buildings, really popped, yet there was no loss of detail evident in the highlights. The mode is the default for all content, although Sony confirmed that one of the cinema presets would allow SDR material to be screened in its native form.

At the ZD9 launch, *HCC* got to see the new TV side-by-side with rival panels from Samsung and LG, and while any staged comparison should be taken with a pinch of salt, there was no doubt in the superior dynamics of the Sony.

Style-wise, the ZD9 TVs all feature a black slate bezel with premium gold trim, and the rear panel has an unusual grid pattern that effectively disguises all pop-off connection covers.

Reaching new heights in audio

Marantz targets Atmos and DTS:X setups with its latest nine-channel AV receiver

Marantz has added another model to its 2016 range of AV receivers in the form of the SR6011. Promising a 'step-up in build quality, sonic performance and features', the new AVR packs nine power amplifiers and supports Dolby Atmos and DTS:X object-based audio.

Due in stores this month, priced around £1,100, the SR6011 is able to drive 7.1.2 or 5.1.4 speaker configurations straight out of the box. However, if this still isn't enough for your home cinema needs, this can be expanded to 7.1.4 with the use of an external amplifier thanks to the SR6011's 11.2-channel processing. The SR6011 employs

Marantz's Hyper Dynamic Amplifier Module (HDAM) to handle all audio signals, while Audyssey MultEQ XT32 takes care of room calibration.

The AVR's eight HDMI 2.0a inputs are compatible with HDCP 2.2 and support 4K Ultra HD 60Hz video, 4:4:4 Pure Color subsampling, HDR, 3D and BT.2020 passthrough. The SR6011 is also friendly with various hi-res audio formats (including DSD, FLAC and ALAC), and packs built-in Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connections.
www.marantz.eu

Marantz continues to style its AVRs with a 'porthole' display window. If it ain't broke...



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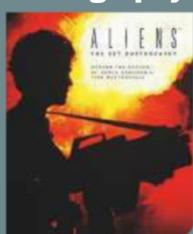
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DYNAUDIO

Extras...

Small items that could make a big impression...

Aliens: The Set Photography



Released to coincide with the 30th anniversary of James Cameron's superb sci-fi

sequel, this hardback devotes its 144 pages to collecting together hundreds of rare on-set photographs documenting the making of the film. While the actual quality of the photos varies wildly, together they still paint a compelling account of the production process. A must-buy for fans, and a steal at just £25.

The Rocky Horror Picture Show FAQ



It may have the film adaptation in its title, but this book guides readers through the entire history of all things *Rocky Horror*. From the legal changes that gave rise to Richard O'Brien's original stage play to its enduring legacy, this fascinating tome (yours for £20) leaves no stone unturned and will have enthusiasts doing the *Time Warp* all over again.

LEGO Doctor Strange's Sanctum Sanctorum



The toy maker serves up another gem from the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Based on the upcoming *Doctor Strange* film, this nifty £30 set features a 358-piece diorama that pits Stephen Strange and two chums (The Ancient One and Karl Mordo) against a Lovecraftian 'Portal Beast' that has invaded the sorcerer's arcane lair.

Sky to follow 4K with VR

UHD footy was just the start, as Beckham joins Virtual Reality push

Sky will launch a dedicated Virtual Reality app this September. Featuring content developed by its newly formed VR Studio, the VR app will offer viewers 'a unique and immersive experience', promises Creative Director Richard Nockles.

'There's a juggernaut of excitement behind VR around the world,' Nockles told HCC. 'Sky being Sky, we're very keen on innovation. We're trying to set the standard and produce amazing content, it's a new genre. We're very much focused on experimentation.'

Sky's in-house VR studio opened for business in February, and has been working closely with the Sky Sports production team, developing content around Formula 1, football, boxing and cycling.

'It's all about intimacy and engagement when you're in the headset,' explains Nockles. 'We want to take audiences to places they would never normally go – I think that's key. We have access to all this amazing content, and can really get into the heart of the action. I think it's a really exciting future.'

Not what viewers expect?

The introduction of VR follows hot on the heels of Sky's move into 4K UHD broadcasting, which began in August and marked the satcaster's return to the high-ground of home entertainment technology. In advance of the launch, HCC was invited along to Sky Sports HQ to take a look behind the scenes of its burgeoning 4K broadcasting operation, and get an early face-full of its VR offering.

Sky has committed to broadcasting 124 Premier League games in UHD, but the service may not be exactly what viewers expect. Steve Smith, director of Sky Sports, admits that while the games and graphics are native 2160p, associated studio punditry remains HD.

'We will only be fully UHD where we are on-site, where we'll have a presentation truck and a match truck for UHD. We'll be upconverting studio content for our *Monday Night...* and *Friday Night Football* shows. Obviously, none of the archive is UHD, either.'

Smith says there are plans to upgrade Sky studios to 4K, but notes: 'That's part of the bigger plan. I think we'll be

Sky's VR app will arrive in time for the PlayStation VR launch in October



Richard Nockles: 'We're trying to set the standard and produce amazing VR content. We're very focused on experimentation'

focusing on live events in UHD. We've got Formula 1 coming in March 2017, which presents a different challenge. All the races will be in UHD, but our presentation pod on site isn't. When Martin Brundle does his grid walk, that'll be 1080/50. It's going to take time to replace kit and end up in full UHD.'

Sky Q upgrade

Ultra HD content is only available via the new Sky Q Silver set-top box. Unlike HD, there are no UHD channels to browse as such. Viewers access 4K sports content either via the Featured section of the menu or via the Red Button Sky Sports News app. All entertainment UHD content is delivered on-demand and these downloads will eat up your hard drive space – a typical 4K movie clocks in at just over 30GB.

At our preview session, Sky also showed off the new Sky Q v3 firmware. This introduces split-screen functionality for the first time. Viewers will be able to watch instant replays of football matches in a POP window, while the 4K game continues. The match is broadcast live by satellite, but the replay is delivered via a 'net connection at 1,280 x 720 resolution.

As for VR, Nockles says Sky will support all platforms, from smartphones to Oculus and HTC Vive. 'We want to maximise our reach,' he says. 'We want to give our customers the best opportunity for experiencing it. October will be a massive month for VR as Sony gets stuck in with PlayStation VR.'

To launch the service, Sky is working with David Beckham. 'Our launch campaign follows Beckham as he goes into the world of Sky VR. Basically we're putting him inside a VR simulator.'



This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



1 BBC iPlayer loophole closed

The legal loophole that allowed people in the UK to watch BBC shows only on iPlayer without having a TV licence has been brought to an end. The change to the law applies to all devices used to access iPlayer, as well as third-party providers such as Sky and Virgin. However, a licence still won't be required for non-BBC catch-up services such as ITV Hub or All4.

2 8K TV arrives

Japanese broadcaster NHK has begun the world's first regular 8K TV broadcasts. Dubbed 'Super Hi-Vision', the 7,680 x 4,320 content (including sports footage and music concerts) is being made available via a satellite test channel that features a mix of 8K and 4K material. With no compatible consumer gear available, the 8K transmissions can currently be watched at public 'viewing stations' across Japan.

3 VHS dead, at last!

It had a good run, but VHS is officially dead. Funai Electric, the last remaining VHS VCR manufacturer, has pulled the plug on the format after 30 years of production, citing a sharp decline in sales and difficulty sourcing parts. Amazingly, it still sold 75,000 VCR units last year.

4 Godfather of Gore sells out

Arrow Video's upcoming *Shock and Gore: The Films of Herschell Gordon Lewis* limited edition Blu-ray boxset has sold out in record time. Packed with 14 of the Godfather of Gore's films plus loads of exclusive goodies, all 500 UK sets sold out on pre-orders in just four days.

5 Eureka goes up the Creek

Eureka Entertainment (best known for its association with the Masters of Cinema Blu-ray range) has snagged the UK rights to the six-part *Wolf Creek* survival horror TV miniseries. The award-winning indie label will release each episode digitally to own 24 hours after they are shown on Fox TV throughout September, before releasing the entire series on DVD and Blu-ray on October 6 (both priced at £24.99).

News x10

6 Samsung upgrades HDR

Samsung has rolled out a firmware upgrade for its 2016 range of SUHD TVs. According to the manufacturer, the automatic HDR+ update will enhance the HDR performance of the screens, including the ability to upgrade Standard Dynamic Range content to HDR-like picture quality. The new firmware also provides 'Expert Mode' picture calibration controls, allowing users to tweak the HDR effects to their satisfaction.

7 Sky expands Buy & Keep

Sky Store has expanded its Buy & Keep service to cover boxsets as well. The enhanced Box Sets Buy & Keep lets customers purchase film and TV shows, with Sky Store downloading a digital copy straight to their TV or mobile device, plus popping a DVD boxset in the post. *Breaking Bad*, *American Horror Story* and *Homeland* are among the shows being offered.

8 TiVo goes 4K

Virgin Media is gearing up to take on Sky Q with its own 4K set-top box. Although details are still thin on the ground at the time of writing, Virgin Media had teased subscribers with a photo of a new 4K TiVo box on its corporate Twitter account.

9 Play-time for UKTV

UKTV's on-demand service UKTV Play should have made its debut on Freeview Play by the time you read this. The UKTV Play app, which is being added automatically to Freeview Play devices, offers catch-up and on-demand services for UKTV's free-to-air channels Dave, Yesterday, Really and Drama.

10 3D Blu-ray feels the Force

Disney has revealed that the highly-anticipated 3D Blu-ray release of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* will hit UK shelves on October 31 (two weeks ahead of the US). However, in a move bound to annoy some fans, the new Collector's Edition 3D Blu-ray will also play host to a number of exclusive bonus features (including more deleted scenes and an audio commentary from director J.J. Abrams) in addition to all of the archival extras from the film's original hi-def platter.



Premiere...

What's happening in the world of TV and films...

Game delayed for snow



Game of Thrones fans will have to wait until Summer 2017 to watch season seven as the long-awaited arrival of winter in the story means that filming has been pushed back to later this year in order to get weather to match. The network has also confirmed that the show's eighth season will be its last.

Actor to miss second Kaiju apocalypse

Charlie Hunnam won't be returning to the role of Jaeger pilot Raleigh Becket in *Pacific Rim: Maelstrom* due to scheduling conflicts. There's no word yet on who will be kicking Kaiju ass in his place.

Rocketeer reboot

It appears that Walt Disney Studios is about to strap on a jet pack and have a second stab at bringing Dave Steven's indie comic *The Rocketeer* to the big screen. Early reports indicate that this time around the source material is being given a modern-day makeover and will headline a black female character.

We asked...

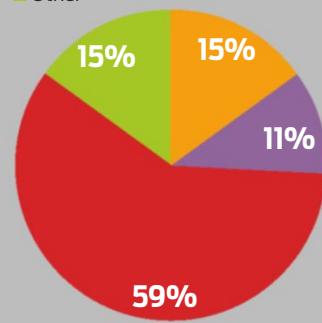
Which is your favourite bigscreen Batman film?

■ Batman (1989)

■ Batman Begins

■ The Dark Knight

■ Other



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The deep Blu sea

The Abyss → Twentieth Century Fox → All-region BD



The wait for the Blu-ray debut of James Cameron's pioneering 1989 sci-fi thriller *The Abyss* is over. Sort of. Speaking about the film at last month's San Diego Comic Con, the director revealed: 'We've done a wet-gate 4K scan of the original negative,

and it's going to look insanely good... We're going to do an authoring pass for Blu-ray and HDR at the same time.' The BD of *The Abyss* is expected to arrive in 2017 – and we assume an HDR-toting Ultra HD Blu-ray release is also on the cards.



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Face to Face

Topics of discussion on the HCC Facebook page

On news that *The Abyss* is set to debut on Blu-ray...



Finally!

Arron Dennis

New colour timing activated...

Mike Wadkins

And about time! WOOHOO!

Steve Old

Any news on a Star Wars 4K disc?

Paul Carter

On JVC's imminent 4K BLUEscent projector...

Pricing will be £10,000+ if it's laser and full 4K!

Matthew Dennehy

Ooh, sounds exciting. I have a JVC projector – love it.

Robi Lee

What you're watching on your home cinema

Batman v Superman, 4K/UHD Blu-ray in 5.2.2 Dolby Atmos. As loud as possible to shake the neighbours!

Mark Edwards

The whole three hours...? Good luck with that!

Lee Regan

Watchmen: Ultimate Cut on 4K Blu-ray

Final Approach on LaserDisc.

Bass on this is wicked with SR-71 afterburners pounding a near 115dB at the back row seating. I think this cult sci-fi, the world's first all-digital audio film, should get a BD release. It's long over due.

Andy Summers

Hopefully *The Revenant* Blu-ray. However, I have been trying to watch this the last three weekends!

Fondriest Steve

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Back of the 'net

Trailers, technology and more to check out on the web



Lock, stock and two smokin' swords

An early trailer for Guy Ritchie's *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword* (due March 2017) has surfaced, and it looks... interesting. Charlie Hunnam takes the title role opposite Jude Law as evil warlord Vortigern, and Ritchie has mustered an army of VFX wizards to complement his trademark camera trickery.

Youtu.be/6rbPTQIdjmY



Happy birthday Aliens

James Cameron, Sigourney Weaver, Bill Paxton, Lance Henriksen and more took part in this Comic Con panel discussion to commemorate the 30th anniversary of sci-fi/action classic *Aliens*. Plenty of insight and information, albeit interspersed with repeated whooping from the star-struck crowd.

Youtu.be/iqRjzU-G_low



Alive and kicking

Readers of a certain age and disposition will be pleased to see the *Kickboxer* franchise return with a svelte-looking Jean-Claude van Damme as part of a cast also including rising martial arts thesp Alain Moussi and Gina Carano. Whip out your old VHS collection before seeing this September 30th.

Youtu.be/9fMjvlegW18



Open your ears

Arcam has added to its accessories range with its new rHead, an 'audiophile' Class A headphone amplifier. Featuring 3.5mm and 6.5mm outputs coupled to both phono and balanced XLR inputs, this compact design retails for £400 and claims to be 'the epitome of clarity and refinement'.

<http://bit.ly/2ars34G>

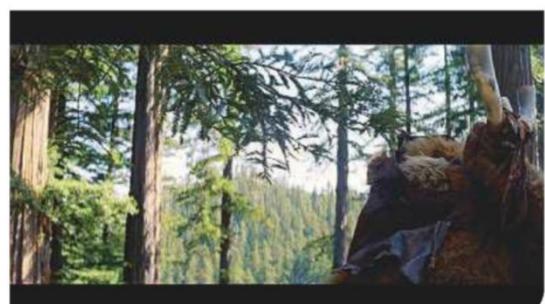
TOP
PICK



JVC sets lasers to stun

Projector specialist JVC has released a brief (too brief!) teaser video for a new native 4K/HDR projector that will use a laser light source and sports new 'BLUEScent' branding. We hope to find out what that means when the model launches at the IFA show this month.

Youtu.be/hZiP8bQVJ5M



Silence is golden

Knowing that some fans can't stand the 'yub nub' Ewok song at the end of *Return of the Jedi*, the Auralnauts team have recut the film's final sequences with a new, tune-free soundtrack, with hilarious consequences. Contains spoilers for the movie, obviously. But it is 33 years old.

Youtu.be/iG9WVDvVd0E

Bilding a better TV...

Loewe Bild 7 → www.loewe.tv.uk



Luxury TV company Loewe has launched its debut 4K OLED flatscreen with support for both HDR 10 and, via an update, Dolby Vision content. The Bild (German for 'picture', says our English/German dictionary) will be available in 55in (Bild 7.55) and 65in (Bild 7.65) models, priced at £4,500 and £6,500 respectively. The TV uses an OLED panel sourced from LG Display, coupled with Loewe's proprietary picture processing, user interface, design and audio embellishments. Each Bild 7 also totes an integrated 120W soundbar that employs six drive units and a quartet of auxiliary bass radiators.

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MASTERS O F A U D I O

With its devotion to digital active loudspeakers and on-site assembly line, UK audio marque Meridian treads its own unique path. **Ed Selleys** visits its Huntingdon HQ to get the inside story



FOR HISTORICAL REASONS, Huntingdon in Cambridgeshire has an extraordinary number of audio manufacturers in close company to one another. One of the leading lights of this cluster is Meridian. Founded in 1977, it has gone about the business of product development in a fashion that's paid little heed to the trends and traditions that might be doing the rounds elsewhere.

Although predominantly known for its hi-fi gear, Meridian has also been a keen supporter of multichannel audio. So when the call came to see if I'd like to witness its new home cinema demo

room, I was halfway up the M11 before I'd put the phone down.

My visit kicked off with a tour of the production plant in the company of Barry Sheldrick, Meridian's Director of Sales. There was an assumption on my part that this would be pretty much identical to other such installations I've nosed around, but there proved to be some intriguing differences. Meridian uses the same processes, staff and equipment to make everything, rather than breaking it down into specialist groups. This actually gives it impressive flexibility in dealing with orders.

Meridian's cinema room has some very special seating...



A trio of DSP8000 speakers lurk behind the projector screen



Own a McLaren car? Meridian puts these in the doors for you...



All final assembly of Meridian gear takes place in the Huntingdon HQ, and this has resulted in the need for clever use of resources and time. When assembling a £15,000 Ultra DAC, for example, the costs of building in the UK are fairly easy to absorb, but when dealing with the £200 Explorer 2 DAC and headphone amp, the challenges are rather greater, so Meridian has developed a process where five Explorer boards are populated as a single unit, before being sliced into sections and inserted into the chassis. It's a clever workaround which considerably reduces production time.

It also becomes clear, amidst the high-tech machinery and stark white décor, that Meridian's test procedures are diligent to the point of obsessive. Whenever a major production process is finished, the product is checked thoroughly. Having completed assembly, everything settles down for a lengthy soak test – where it is left performing one or more functions for an extended period. By the time you unbox a Meridian component for the first time, it's been through some rigorous procedures.

Embracing Barco

A healthy selection of these products are on display in the all-new cinema room. What isn't present, however, is a Meridian projector, which may come as a surprise for those who remember the brand leading the 4K PJ charge a few years back with its 810 Reference Video Projector. Sheldrick explains that Meridian has taken the decision to move back from areas with a high rate of 'churn' and development (certainly a charge that can be levelled at the video world), and this means image duties in its demo suite are left to other brands (Barco and Kaleidescape). In fact, Meridian and Barco's residential division have now inked a deal whereby the latter's high-end PJs will join the former's audio kit in Meridian's home cinema design and specification service.

The cinema uses a medley of the company's active speakers. Meridian is one of the best known producers of actives, and its strikingly shaped designs are coolly sophisticated. The theory behind such speakers in a home cinema system is entirely sound, and results in a kit rack that's extremely compact, with an 861v8 Surround Controller and an HD621 HDMI interface. There's no need for the customary wall of power amps as everything is built into the speakers themselves. Of course, if you want to use power amps, the system is able to mix and match passive channels.

As a Meridian setup is more like a network than a conventional hookup, it is impressively customisable. If you need more oomph from your centre channel, for example, it's no trouble to run two centre channels in parallel. The speakers are 'aware' of each other and can be set to work together rather than simply doubling up and hoping for the best. Technologies like the company's Enhanced Bass Alignment (EBA) ensure that multiple speakers behave like a single unit, and that output reaches you as a single, cohesive signal.

This flexibility also means that Meridian systems can grow and adapt to your requirements. It hopes >

Meridian line

Flagship DSP8000 speakers set the premium bar

At the very top of Meridian's digital active speaker line is its DSP8000, also available, since 2014, in Special Edition guise. Meridian boasts that this floorstander is 'one of the few loudspeakers available that can reproduce the sound of a full-size grand piano at realistic volume and with realistic dynamic range.'



Unsurprisingly for speakers that sell for over £30,000 a pair, the DSP8000s offer an immaculate construction. Adjustable solid aluminium feet keep it firmly grounded, while the enclosure is crafted from a bespoke material (called Meridium) that aims to be 'soundless'. The top part of the speaker, for all intents and purposes separate from the bottom, houses a single 1in short-horn Beryllium dome tweeter, above a 6.25in mid-range driver. Below this, a larger cabinet packs six side-mounted 8in bass drivers. Driving the three-way design is internal amplification rated at a combined 750W. And then there's everything else that comes with Meridian's loudspeaker ethos – onboard DACs, EBA time alignment, anti-jitter buffering, active crossovers and more.

Too expensive for you? Then make a beeline instead for the DSP3200 standmount speakers. At £2,500 a pair, these are the most affordable entry-point into Meridian's speaker line.



Where it all began: one of the very first Meridian systems



Amps and power supplies are integrated into the DSP speakers

to offer impressive longevity in an industry where products can be current for a painfully short length of time. As the 'v8' part of the 861's product title suggests, Meridian has regularly updated its AV processor. The HD621, designed to strip PCM from HDMI for the 861 to process, has been around since 2008, which is an epoch in HDMI terms. However, it is due for replacement in 2017, as Meridian moves forward with plans for new solutions with HDMI 2.0 and Dolby Atmos support (the new demo room is already running height speakers in a 7.4.4 config, using DSP320 in-ceiling/in-wall models).

You'll be wanting to know what it sounds like. Settle down in one of those smart-looking chairs (they're actually from the Range Rover Evoques that were modified for use in James Bond flick *Spectre*...) and prepare to be seriously impressed. And you don't sit there listening for the clever technology, or the fact that the system is active, or even that behind the screen sit three whopping DSP8000 flagship speakers that manage to look stunning and borderline menacing at the same time. Instead you concentrate on the performance.

I say 'concentrate' but in reality, for the first few minutes at least, you'll likely be slack-jawed in astonishment that any system developed for domestic use can have the reserves of power and sheer impact that this one does. An excerpt of Muse's live concert DVD is an object lesson in placement, tonality and integration. The music arrives at the listening position with no need for the brain to put thought into it sees and hears. The two match perfectly.

Switching to film, I spun up my stock test piece – the helicopter winching sequence in *Unstoppable*. I've heard this hundreds of times, and I've never heard anything like what this system does. The weight of the locomotives is tangible but at the same time every fine detail in this dense mix is there for your appreciation. This is equipment that effortlessly blurs the boundaries between home and professional use. I could have spent hours flicking



Everything, down to the £200 Explorer DAC, is UK assembled



Meridian's HQ includes anechoic testing facilities

through the films on offer... but there was one final facet of Meridian's activities to see.

Pushing the audio envelope

The MQA (Master Quality Authenticated) audio format is a big buzz in hi-fi. While developed by Meridian founder Bob Stuart and supported on a number of Meridian products, MQA is a separate entity, dealing with numerous brands, including Pioneer, Onkyo and Tidal. It therefore has to operate at arm's length, so to meet Stuart I had to trek out of Meridian's space in the building and into MQA's.

The tech allows for a high-res, studio master-quality audio file to be transmitted in a more compressed condition than is the case for existing high-res rivals. The benefits of this are obvious – more music housed on a portable media player, improved quality of streaming platforms. And perhaps crucially for the prospects of weary veterans adopting another format, MQA has been designed to work at two levels. If you have a standard DAC or streamer, an MQA file will play without the additional information added to the signal. If you have an MQA decoder, it will process the extra info for better quality.

It's hard not to be won over by Stuart's passion for MQA as a concept. And as far as he and his team are concerned, this is more than a method of beefing up quality. MQA is being mooted as a means of correcting errors in encoding and mastering that have affected recordings from the outset of digital. I had demos in the cosy confines of the MQA test room, and sample material (including Steely Dan's *Babylon Sisters*) managed to sound exceptionally good, and crucially avoided that overtly 'digital' feeling that can bedevil high-res formats.

And there was an interesting hint for the future. At the moment, MQA is focused on two-channel audio but it was suggested that, as and when the company has the time and resources to do so, it could make a play for the multichannel world, too, supplying higher-quality sonics to on-demand video services. I'll be all ears ■

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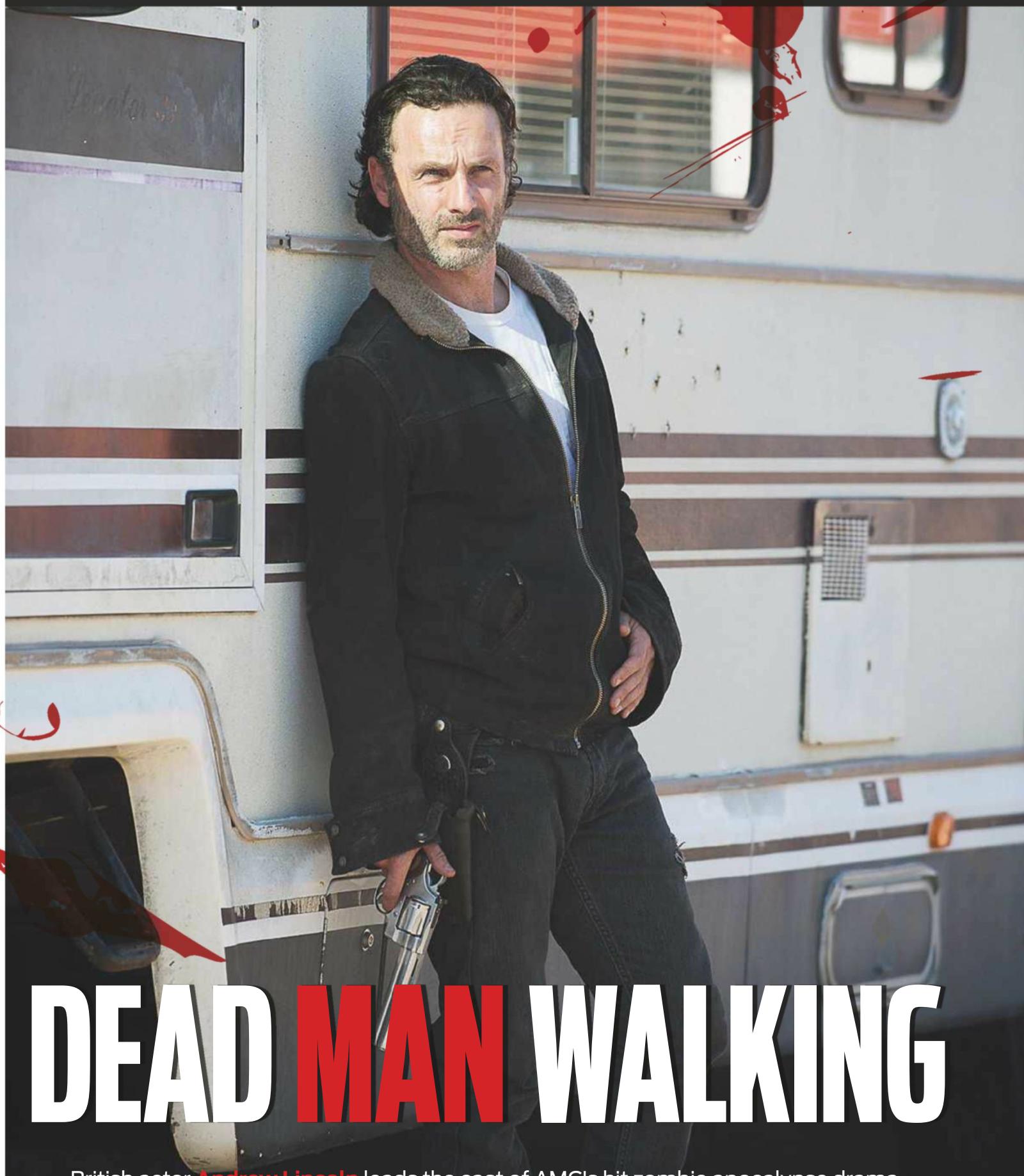
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DEAD MAN WALKING

British actor **Andrew Lincoln** leads the cast of AMC's hit zombie apocalypse drama *The Walking Dead*. Here he talks about playing an action hero, his favourite moments of Season Six, and growing up watching *The A-Team*



SINCE ITS DEBUT season in 2010, *The Walking Dead* has been both a critical and commercial success, hoovering up awards and spawning a loyal fanbase desperate to keep up with its band of post-zombie-apocalypse survivors, led by Andrew Lincoln's Rick Grimes. Shot on 16mm film and based on Robert Kirkman's acclaimed comic book, *The Walking Dead* exudes a gritty aesthetic and cinematic stylings, making it ripe for marathon home cinema sessions. Season 6 is coming to Blu-ray this month...

Growing up, do you remember the craze for zombie films and the 'video nasties' era?

I do. I remember *I Spit on your Grave* and *Driller Killer* and I remember that there was this sort of subversive cult. There were whisperings of these certain VHS tapes... Some were apocryphal myths. Some films were said to be snuff movies, when they clearly weren't!

When I was a teenager I used to go round to my friend James' house, and he had *The Evil Dead* films. He was very keyed into that genre. We have a common history of vampires and Mary Shelley but the zombie mythology, specifically, comes from America and I wasn't as keyed in to that. Obviously, I have become a part of it now.

I would say that the horror movies that spoke to me as a teenager were *Jaws* and *Don't Look Now*, which was huge. [*Don't Look Now* director] Nic Roeg is such a different kind of filmmaker. That film is so challenging and, editorially, he's really clever. It was more a meditation on grief, like a lot of horror movies. It is about fear, death and bereavement.

Would a film like *Don't Look Now* get made today?

It's a very interesting point. Where would that market be and where would that sweet spot be now in current filmmaking? I'm not sure. It is probably on television now, for that kind of film.

There will always be auteurs that will get films made, but who is going to stump up the cash to make something like that? You can imagine the pitch: 'It's about a couple that lost their child and they go to Venice and they are haunted by it.' It doesn't make any sense but I think it is a beautiful, beautiful love story, really.

Onto *The Walking Dead*. Why do you think it has proved so popular?

There are whole conventions given over to this genre and it is a remarkable thing. I don't know. My first thought would be [showrunner] Frank Darabont, who was instrumental in identifying that there was a niche market that hadn't been explored on TV and he decided to write something that I had never read before, where the first episode was like a silent movie. I had never read a pilot like it.

And then I think a lot has to be said for Robert Kirkman. He's written source material that has lasted for over 12 years now and which continues to have a voracious market. So that obviously has good storytelling — to be able to hold a very



The Walking Dead brings cinematic zombie horror to the smallscreen



Lincoln enjoys the series' action beats: 'I am a zombie slayer!'

AMC's groundbreaking series has earned plaudits for its makeup FX



savvy readership. Those two things — one of the most pre-eminent storytellers in Hollywood and source material that has had longevity — combined with having Gale Anne Hurd [*The Terminator*, *Armageddon*], one of the most amazing producers in Hollywood.

Shooting on film had a huge impact. And it was a great, original idea to make something that was six hours of a continuous movie and a continuous story that is ever-changing, and which keeps reinventing itself through the loss of characters and the movement of trying to find a safe haven.

It's lightning in a bottle. Sometimes it happens and maybe the time and the culture were right for it to capture people's imaginations. It feels like the media fuelled it as well; social media really took off as this was growing. The [fans'] ownership rights on it became more tribal as well, and maybe that built the cult status into something bigger.

When you play a character for six years, do the writers start incorporating parts of your personality into the role?

All the characters I have played in 23 years of acting, part of them are me and my imagination. What happens when you do a long-running TV show, certainly with this where there is a plethora of talented actors, is that we riff a bit and we improvise and we see things in off-cuts of scenes that surprise the writers or the showrunners. And they go, 'We'll look at that,' and it germinates into a storyline two seasons down the road.

How has Rick Grimes changed across the six years?

He's changed enormously since he was the guy that I woke up with in the hospital. And that is one of the enduring appeals of playing the part; their environment forms these people. Is it nature or is it nurture? That is the question that is thrown into this crucible. What is learned, what is already there?

Rick has changed a great deal. I love the fact that he's almost replicated. He was almost channelling Shane [Walsh, played by Jon Bernthal] in Season 5, while he was at odds with him in Season 2. He was the sort of moral high ground, or the old moral code, and now he has adapted. In the returning [Season 6] mid-season premiere, he has

Dead and loving it...

84 years of zombie movies

White Zombie

1932 spook-flick starring Bela Lugosi as a voodoo practitioner (named 'Murder') who controls an army of the undead. The first zombie movie? Probably.

Plan 9 from Outer Space

Ed Wood's derided sci-fi saw its alien antagonists implementing 'plan 9' – an attempt to take over Earth by reanimating corpses.

Night of the Living Dead

George A. Romero's 1968 classic cemented the status of zombies as flesh-eating horrors, created a franchise that ran for over 40 years, and inspired countless imitators.

The Return of the Living Dead

Enjoyably daft 1985 horror comedy that shares naming rights with *Night of the Living Dead* but not much else. *Alien* writer Dan O'Bannon is behind the camera.

Braindead

Before he turned his life over to making films about Hobbits, Peter Jackson co-wrote and helmed this over-the-top zombie gorefest.

Resident Evil

Successful video game adaptation that gives Mila Jovovich (as heroine Alice) a chance to show off her action talents battling virus-infected beasties.

Shaun of the Dead



Brit comedy from Simon Pegg and Edgar Wright that's heavy on the laughs but not afraid to ramp up the horror, too.

World War Z

Brad Pitt's big-budget global zombie thriller had a troubled production, but box office success means a sequel is on the way.

The Walking Dead has been filmed on 16mm since its first season



recalibrated his leadership again. He has had to. He has admitted he was wrong and now we stand at the beginning of a potentially civilised nation, a real civilisation. So he has got hope again.

What are the conflicts that abound in Season 6?

Our show needs thrills and spills and jeopardy. There is also nuance, of course, but that is something that is very appealing. You will see in a certain episode that it is almost the first time that we have ever tonally changed the show to such a large degree. It is much more about hanging with these people. What is it like to be with them? What are we fighting for? Romance? Love? Laughter? Future? It's about the beginnings of culture again, and how do soldiers do that? Maybe we are a little early in the show for a comedy of manners, but we have a little bit of that in a certain episode.

Do you enjoy shooting the action scenes?

I love it. And the people I trained with at RADA think it is hilarious. I am classically trained and yet I wear cowboy boots and a Stetson and I shoot zombies for a living. I am a zombie-slayer! People often say, 'Do you think it struggles to break out of the genre of horror?' And I say, 'It is not a horror; it's a Western.' This is like an apocalyptic Western. We shoot it like a Western. There's a very classical Western theme throughout it. One of my favourite movies is *The Magnificent Seven*. One of our recent episodes is our version of *The Magnificent Seven*. We get to play and do crazy stuff, daily, and it changes. It is not like procedural

dramas that I've done before where you know that there's a murder, it needs to be solved, there is a side story, a love affair. This is not like one of those law shows, which is maybe why people engage. It's stripped of everything and it's wild. It's the Wild West!

Were Westerns a part of your movie childhood?

The things on a Saturday that we used to tune into were very American: *The A-Team*, *Knight Rider*... Also, I loved *Blake's 7* and *Star Trek*. All of those things I dug. But then, of course, it became about the language of film as I got more into drama as an idea of making a living. Then I started eating up all the '70s and '80s indie filmmaking in America. Political filmmaking had a real fervour. What really attracted me was the fact that there was a moral imperative behind a lot of filmmaking, which is something that we need to re-engage with.

What episodes in Season 6 stand out for you?

I think Episode 3. I love that, with Glenn [Rhee, played by Steven Yeun] and Michael Slovis, the first time he directed for us. He is a very established brilliant DoP [Director of Photography] and a great director in his own right. He came and he just nailed that episode, visually, and made it incredibly arresting. In terms of storytelling, I thought it was brilliant.

Also, I always love the season premieres with all the scale and ambition. I think Scott [Gimple, producer] has been fantastic. What I loved about Scott is that he went, 'Right, we're not apologising for the fact that this is a zombie show. It's full of zombies.'

Rick Grimes: a man with an axe to grind...





And I will say that the 'back eight' is one of the strongest back eights that we have done. The returning episode was amazing, just because it felt like a combination of all the things that the show does as well. It is a thrill ride with big, epic, action sequences. It was a coming together. It was very emotional but also it marked the end of a certain phase in Rick's leadership and it was a rebirth.

The final episode this season is just amazing. We leave the show in a certain place and we do something that we've never done before. When I read it, it shocked me to the core and the same when we were filming it. I think it is going to upset a lot of people but in a brilliant way.

TV shows love to really shock their audiences these days...

It is wonderful because you can reward fans for loyalty by shocking them. It also helps as an actor. I didn't realise that I would ever play something for six years. You come in with six years of history with an audience who sit there with that knowledge and it takes the pressure off somewhat and makes it more real in a sense. You do your utmost to not disclose how you feel.

When you do conventions and meet fans, are there moments from across the seasons that always crop up?

Yes. All the big deaths. Basically, people recall the big deaths. People try and put their finger on why that is. It is a kind of endurance test watching this because it's about people dealing with trauma. If people buy in to it, which they do and they love it and identify with certain characters, then they can't help but be moved by those characters dying.

How does Season 6 compare to previous runs in terms of its pacing?

Because I don't watch it, I am not a particularly good person to ask that question to! But I do know that it does feel like a tale of two mid-seasons. It leads over from last season and, chapter-wise, I think Scott writes close to a narrative that is honouring the comic book. And so sometimes the chapters can end mid-season like this one. That's very much the end of a chapter that has probably spilled over from



when Rick arrived at Alexandria towards the end of last season. So that is the way to look at it rather than season to season. The second half is much more kinetic. The first is more stately, and much more about the gang looking inwards. The second half is much more about looking outside at a much bigger universe.

Do the writers ever give you fake scripts with fake deaths?

I think they do for spoiler concerns. But [name redacted] told me that they were going to do a fake, or at least he wasn't dead, and then I read the script and I called him up and said, 'Dude, you ought to call and speak to your reps because it says that you die.' A lot of people on set were really grieving because it wasn't common knowledge for quite some time.

Lastly, do you watch the prequel series, *Fear the Walking Dead*?

No. I have met all of the cast, and they are lovely, and great actors. We met them all at Comic-Con. I am very focused on just doing this, and there is something to be said about keeping isolated. We [as characters] are isolated and we don't know certain things and if there is a common mythology I don't want to know things that Rick shouldn't know. I just haven't had an opportunity to watch it but I know the lead actors' work and I admire it very much ■

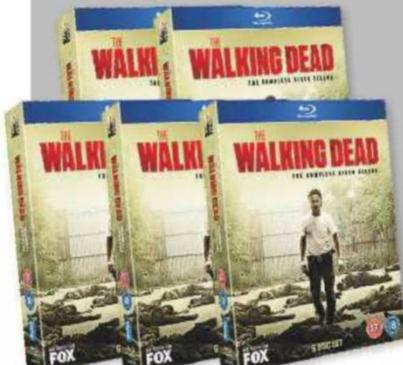
The series is shot on location in the southern – and hot – state of Georgia



Walkers clamouring for a sneak peek at the script for Season Seven...

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Bigger and better than ever, *The Walking Dead: The Complete Sixth Season* is available to buy on Blu-ray and DVD from September 26, courtesy of Entertainment One, and to celebrate we've got five Blu-rays to give away. To be in with a chance of winning one, simply answer the following question correctly...

Question:

Andrew Lincoln plays Rick Grimes in *The Walking Dead*. But who plays his son Carl?

Answer:

A) Chandler Riggs B) Chandler Bing C) Raymond Chandler

Email your answer with 'Walking Dead 6' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address! See p86 for full terms and conditions

REVIEW: Turn to p104 for our verdict on the Blu-ray boxset



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Dolby Atmos cabin fever!

How does a former movie industry professional relax in the evening? By kicking back in a log-cabin cinema room with pro-grade audio and a 3.3m screen...

A

I WANNA
BE LIKE...
You-hoo-hoo!
The Jungle Book
comes to life on
Blu-ray p96

SYSTEM HARDWARE

KALEIDESCAPE: Strato Ultra HD movie player/server (6TB); Disk Server (320-disc vault)

SCREEN RESEARCH: 3.3m X-Mask TheatreCurve projection screen (2:40:1 native aspect ratio with masking) with ClearPix 4K acoustically transparent screen material

DIGITAL PROJECTION: HIGHlite 740 1080p three-chip DLP projector

PRISMASONIC: Motorised anamorphic lens

DATASAT: RS20i processor with decoding for Dolby Atmos, DTS:X and Auro-3D; 2 x RA7300 seven-channel power amplifiers

PROCCELLA AUDIO: 3 x P815 LCR speakers; 4 x P8 surround channel speakers; 5 x P8 height channel speakers; 2 x P18 dual 18in passive subwoofers; 2 x DA-06 amplifiers for P18 subs

FORTRESS SEATING: 5 x single cinema seats (front row); 2 x 'Loveseats' (rear row)

D-BOX: 1 x motion actuator system for cinema seating

LUTRON: Lighting system

CRESTRON: Control system

**THIS BOTTOM-OF-THE-GARDEN CINEMA**

oozes high-end charm. Owned by a former movie industry professional – who we can only refer to as David – it provides him with a state-of-the-art screening room. Its appeal isn't all hardware-based, either. There's plenty of attention to detail here when it comes to design and comfort.

The project began when David was hunting for a new property. 'In my opinion, a search for a retirement home should include space to build your own cinema,' he tells *HCC*. 'And, for numerous reasons, situated away from the main house!'

David's background is in movie production sound mixing (he's a member of both the Association of Motion Picture Sound and the American Cinema Audio Society) and this meant he was heavily involved in selecting the audio hardware for his cinema room. He reveals that after extensive demonstrations of professional-grade speaker systems he settled on Procella Audio – the home theatre specialist established by DTS sound engineers. 'My job in the industry was to listen to dialogue, so I must confess to being somewhat fussy about my selection.'

Originally specced with a 'flat' speaker array, the cinema now offers Dolby Atmos, DTS:X and Auro-3D playback through its multichannel system>

A. Now that's a bigscreen

For an authentic cinema experience, install specialist Pulse Cinemas specified a 3.3m curved projector screen from Screen Research, used in conjunction with a Digital Projection HIGHlite three-chip DLP projector

B. It's curtains!

The sliding red curtains are integrated into the room's Crestron control system, giving the cinema some retro chic, while sympathetic Lutron-managed lighting creates a snug vibe

C. 'Got an Allen key?'

The building started life as a log cabin, the size of a double garage, imported from Norway. 'It arrived in a LEGO-type flatpack and took three weeks to build,' reveals the owner





D. Sitting pretty

David is a huge fan of the Fortress cinema seating, arranged here in a curved five-seat front row with a pair of more relaxed 'loveseats' behind

E. Up-front audio

The front three speakers are Procella Audio's potent THX-certified P815s. These double-stacked cabinets feature a 1.5in high-frequency compression driver, 8in mid-range and a whopping 15in woofer

F. Industry favourite

A Kaleidescape server/player system is a regular feature of high-end installs – this room uses the brand's new Strato Ultra HD player and a 320-disc vault, providing access to both on-demand movies and the owner's own Blu-ray/DVD collection



that includes a five-strong height-channel complement. Datasat hardware handles processing and amplification. Procella Audio P18 subwoofers (each featuring dual 18in drivers) deliver LFE that can be felt as well as heard.

A Digital Projection HIGHlite 740 three-chip DLP projector has the brightness output to partner the cinema's gargantuan 3.3m screen, a curved CinemaScope ratio model from Screen Research. For that all-important cinema vibe, the screen is hidden behind red curtains that open at the touch of a button. The interior design of the room was established to echo David's days as a projectionist in his village cinema.

Having this theatre to retreat to – complete with movies-on-demand via a Kaleidescape server and smart lighting and control – is never likely to disappoint, and it's safe to say that David is pleased with his picture palace.

'I feel incredibly fortunate to have my very own cinema. I sit down to watch a movie every evening after dinner... it really is a first-class viewing pleasure.'

'I wanted a viewing theatre away from the main house, as I love playing soundtracks and movies at a level that seemed to infuriate my beautiful late wife; all the cabin walls have been insulated and thankfully very little sound escapes. Sometimes the small Cyprus tree outside gently quivers with the enormity of bass. My village friends still seem to be speaking to me, so I guess the sound isn't travelling much further.'

'If you love movies, consider a cinema for your home... Or garden.' ■





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Taking home cinema for a spin

WONDER WOMAN?

Season One of US TV series *Supergirl* flies in on Blu p105



KIT CHECKLIST

SONY: VPL-VW320ES 4K/Ultra HD projector

SCREENINT: Modigliani 2.5m 16:9 fixed-frame acoustically transparent projector screen

DLS: 4 x Flatbox XL speakers for rear and surround channels; 1 x FlatSUB 8.1 subwoofer

KEF: 3 x Ci200QL for the front left, right, and centre channels; 2 x Ci160QL for the Atmos overhead speakers

SAVANT: Smart Host with Pro remote for control

HDBASET: Extension kit for Sky+HD

SONY: BDP-S7200 Blu-ray player; PlayStation games console

APPLE: Apple TV

YAMAHA: RX-A1050 AV receiver
STARSCAPE: KNX colour change LED lighting kit

This Ultra HD and Dolby Atmos theatre room takes over one half of a garage – but makes sure its owner can keep an eye on his four wheels of fun



VROOOM! THIS UNUSUAL home cinema setup is the result of a car-mad movie fan who wanted to split his double garage in half, thus creating space for a high-spec theatre and a slick residence for his motor. And he wanted to be able to see one side from the other...

CEDIA-registered install outfit Cre8tive Rooms took up the challenge, and delivered this eye-catching solution. Work time on the project was a rapid 15 days.

As befits a modern home cinema, Ultra HD projection and Dolby Atmos audio are catered for. A Sony VPL-VW320ES, mounted to the ceiling at the rear of the room, fires at a 2.5m-wide projector screen. The chosen ratio of 16:9 means it's suited to both movies and bigscreen sports.

The speaker configuration is 7.1.2. In-wall and in-ceiling UniQ driver models from KEF's Ci line are used for the front LCR soundstage (hidden from sight behind the screen) and the Atmos overhead channels. Two-way Flatbox speakers from Swedish brand DLS are sited on-wall for the surround and rear channels. Providing audio processing and 110W-per-channel amplification is a Yamaha RX-A1050 receiver.

Source gear for the cinema includes a Sony Blu-ray player and PlayStation, Sky+HD and Apple TV. These are housed in a wall-mounted rack on the car-side of the garage, in addition to the hardware for the Savant smart control system that makes driving the cinema room easy.

A. Viewing pleasure

As the room is primarily a cinema, a fixed-frame projector screen (2.5m wide) was chosen. Sitting behind it are the LCR speakers

B. Two up top

For the room's dual Atmos height speakers, Cre8tive used KEF Ci160QL models. These feature a Uni-Q coaxial driver array for a uniform, wide dispersion

C. Pristine parking

The garage space has also been finished to a high standard with black showroom-style tiles. The AV rack is also situated here (out of shot), saving space in the theatre



Through the looking glass

Perhaps the most startling aspect of this conversion is the window between the cinema and the other side, a key demand of the owner. The solution is clever, as at times it is transparent, and other times hides its secret with a reflective surface.

'Due to budget constraints the tinted window isn't an electric optical solution,' reveals Cre8tive's Technical Director Nick Oke. 'We used a special film which rests in different light situations. When the light in the showroom side is 33 per cent brighter than in the cinema it becomes see-through. LED lights were installed in the showroom to achieve this result. When the lights are off, the cinema is brighter than the garage so the film acts like a mirror. This also helped us to overcome the relatively narrow room dimensions of the cinema, giving a feel of space.'

Having a window in this position isn't perhaps ideal when it comes to room acoustics, yet the installers found the glass didn't have as much of a reflective property as expected. Again, sticking to a tight budget meant bespoke room treatments weren't an option, but the carpeted floor and quartet of soft-fabric recliners help dampen acoustics, and the speaker/amp system was fully calibrated.

The end result is a space that surely hits the unusual brief – a garage conversion that still finds space to park a car, and makes a feature of it too. Now, where'd we leave our *Fast & Furious* boxset? ■

D. We are scaling...

A Sony VPL-VW320ES projector displays sources (upscaled to its 4K resolution) including Blu-ray, Sky+HD and Apple TV

E. Box clever

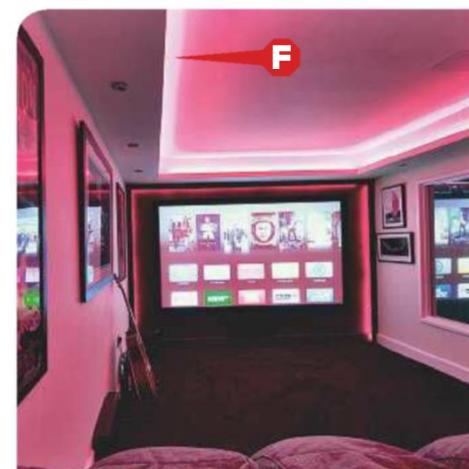
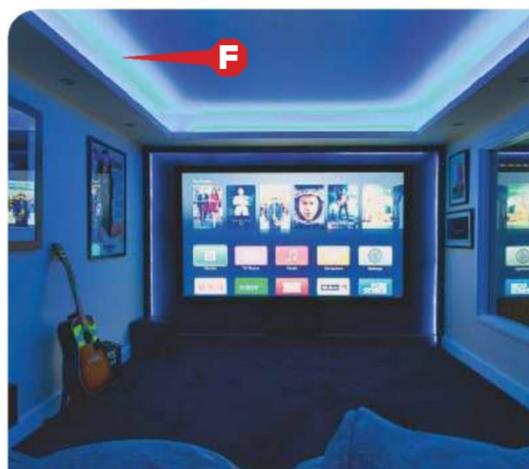
On-wall DSL Flatbox speakers are used for the rear and surround channels. The latter are installed at a lower than usual height due to the specific demands of the room design

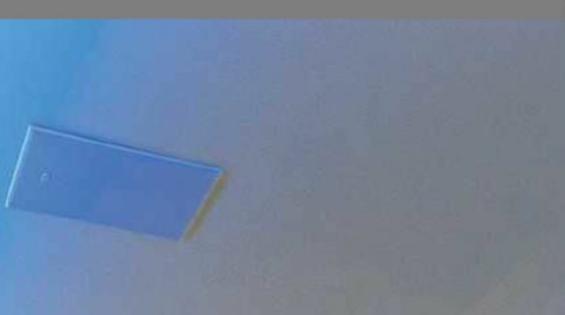
F. Light touch

The ceiling soffit provides space for an LED lighting installation that can be changed to suit the owner's mood. There's also bias lighting framing the screen

G. Now you see me...

The window that joins both garage and cinema room is either see-through or mirrored depending on light levels

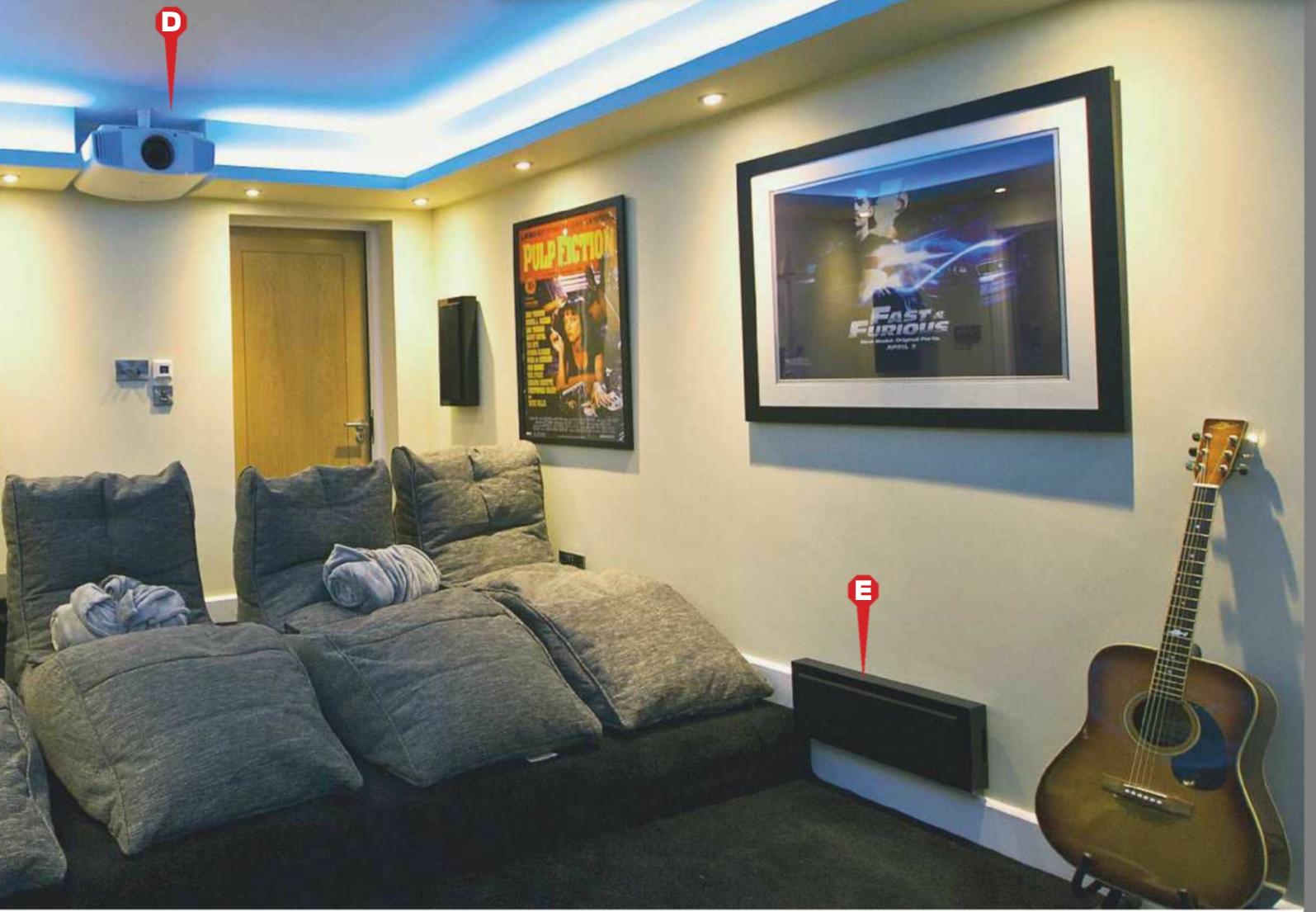




With the room build under way, the dividing wall between cinema and garage has been established with space for the eventual smart mirror window



The ceiling soffit was designed from the outset to accommodate the cinema's Sony Ultra HD projector, with cabling run in-wall



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HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★☆☆☆
Disappointing	★☆☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆



**FIRE
STARTER**

Gotham: Season Two delivers more comic capers on Blu-ray p100

John Archer bathes in the glory of LG's flagship OLED TV, even while he wonders whether it's good value

What price beauty?

As well as beefing up both the performance and design of its OLED TVs for 2016, LG has increased the number of 4K/UHD sets you can choose from. There are now four distinct ranges, with the 65in 'Signature' OLED65G6, under scrutiny here, sitting right at the top. This makes it an exciting prospect given the quality we've already seen lower down the range – provided, that is, you can afford the six grand cost of entry.

The TV's first stab at justifying its cost comes with its simply spectacular design. By mounting its OLED 'film' directly onto a sheet of glass it's able to deliver an incredibly thin screen that serves up an added dose of glamour in the form of a see-through trim running round all four edges.

The OLED65G6's design differs from that of the also glass-based (but £1,000 cheaper) E6 series in two key ways. First, since all the G6 model's connections and processors have been moved into its table top stand, the thinness extends over the screen's entire rear area, rather than just two thirds of it as happens with the E6. Also, that stand differs from the one of the E6 in that it can be pivoted back to become a wall mount.

As with its more affordable sibling, the OLED65G6 fits a Harman/Kardon-designed soundbar to the front of its mount (C6/B6 models house their driver arrays within their back-panels). Niftily, this soundbar has speakers on its top as well as front edge, which means you still get forward-facing speakers even after rotating the base back for wall mounting. The 'bar uses a 60W 4.2-channel speaker setup. Again, this is an improvement on the E6.

When it comes to picture technology, it's perhaps a surprise to find LG claiming that the OLED65G6's image engine is essentially the same as the one found in all of its 2016 OLED models, including the base-level B6 series. Experience of other models in the range suggests there may be some minor picture performance differences, but you can't help but wonder if the G6 series shouldn't offer significant improvements for its money on top of the aesthetic and audio upgrades.

Specs appeal

LG's range-topper earns its Ultra HD Premium certification from the Ultra HD Alliance courtesy of (amongst other

things) a colour range of around 96 per cent of the HDR-friendly DCI-P3 colour space and a peak brightness level (albeit under strict conditions) of around 680 nits. Furthermore, it's capable of playing both the HDR 10 and Dolby Vision takes on high dynamic range; LG is currently the only TV brand in the UK supporting Dolby Vision.

Naturally, the set sports LG's latest WebOS smart TV interface, complete with Netflix and Amazon 4K/HDR apps. Netflix, at the time of writing, is the only UK source of Dolby Vision HDR material, although it should hit Amazon too before the year's out.

Delving deeper into the TV's smart features, though, uncovers a surprise: no Freeview Play. This means that, unlike all LG's other 2016 OLED sets, the G6 doesn't carry catch-up apps for all of the UK's key broadcasters, or Freeview Play's back-scrolling catch-up TV interface. LG claims not to have included Freeview Play on the OLED65G6 because it believes people buying it will already have other external catch-up TV products. That's probably true, but it strikes me as bizarre that such an expensive TV should actually lack a feature found on cheaper iterations.

A key feature the OLED65G6 does share with every other OLED TV, though, is the way each pixel can deliver its own light and colour rather than having to share an external light source with other pixels, as LCD TVs do. So hopefully it will continue to deliver the outrageous black levels that are the technology's trademark.

Beaten black and Blu

Keen to push the OLED65G6 to its limits right away, I dug out my Ultra HD Blu-ray of *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*, with its Ultra HD, HDR and wide colour gamut thrills. And the set did indeed perform very

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Premium HDR/Ultra HD OLED TV

POSITION: The flagship 65in set in LG's 2016 TV range

PEERS: LG OLED65E6; Samsung UE65KS9500; Sony KD-75XD9405

1. Top dog? Almost – a 77in model (£25,000!) is also an option

2. LG's Signature TV comes with snazzy Signature handsets



much in line with LG's other OLED models – which is, of course, generally a really, really good thing.

BvS is a relentlessly dark film and as such plays right into the OLED65G6's hands. During the headline superhero scrap the TV delivers simply the richest, deepest blacks the flatscreen world (and, yes, it is flat rather than curved) has to offer. It does so without so much as a pixel of light 'bleed' or haloing around the brightest image elements. Even Batman's ominously glowing eyes against his pitch-black helmet are a bleed-free zone, which is something LCD TVs struggle to achieve in HDR mode.

This means the LG immediately sells the 'dark half' of the HDR story, especially as OLED's pixel-level illumination means you get to see levels of detail and colour subtlety amid the fight's black backdrops that tend to be lost in greyness – or, at least, areas of light bleed – with LCD sets.

'This screen produces what might well be the finest standard dynamic range pictures in the TV world'

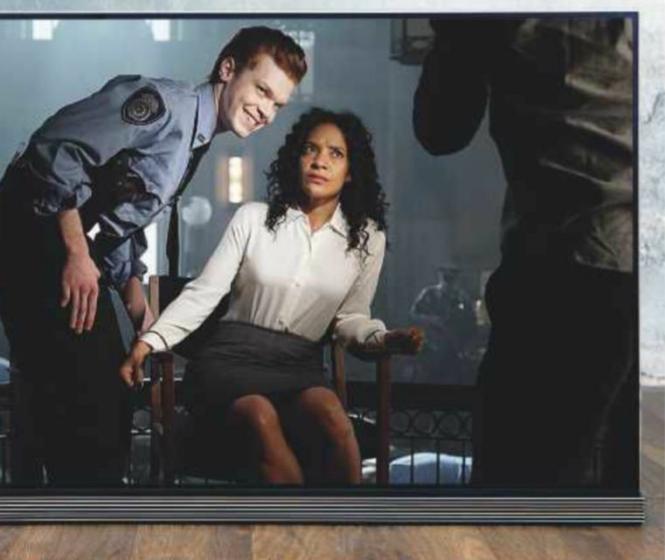
The OLED65G6 also delivers good UHD sharpness and detail with *Batman v Superman*, picking out tell-tale 4K signs like extra texture and detailing in the film's 'super suits', and helping to add a heightened sense of slightly dilapidated realism to pretty much every sequence. Shots across Metropolis and Gotham also enjoy the immersive depth I've come to associate with Ultra HD.

I felt detailing actually looks slightly more refined here than it does on LG's other OLED screens – and the same is true of its colours. *BvS*'s various awkward dark tones have a nuanced and slightly warmer feel.

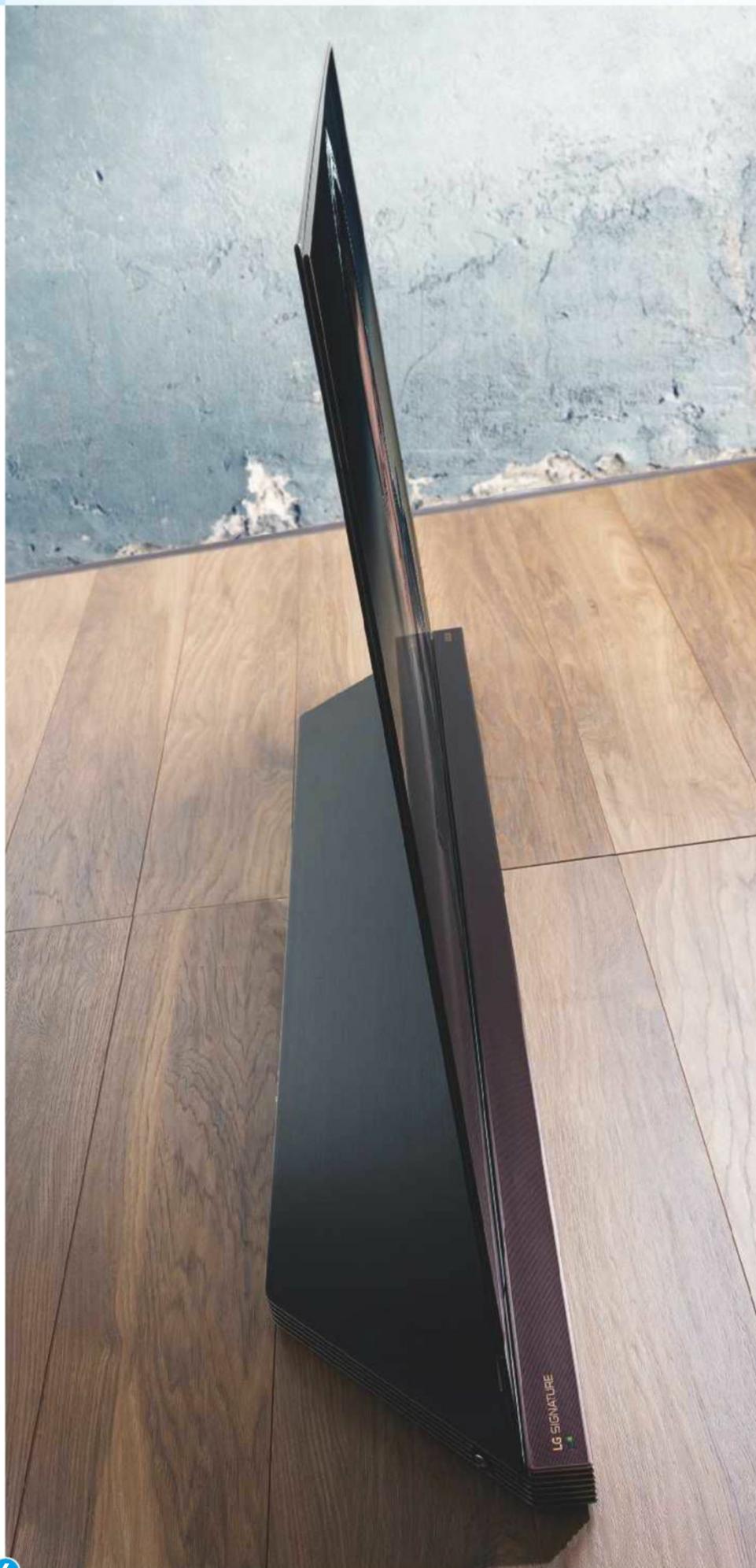
Not quite a bright star

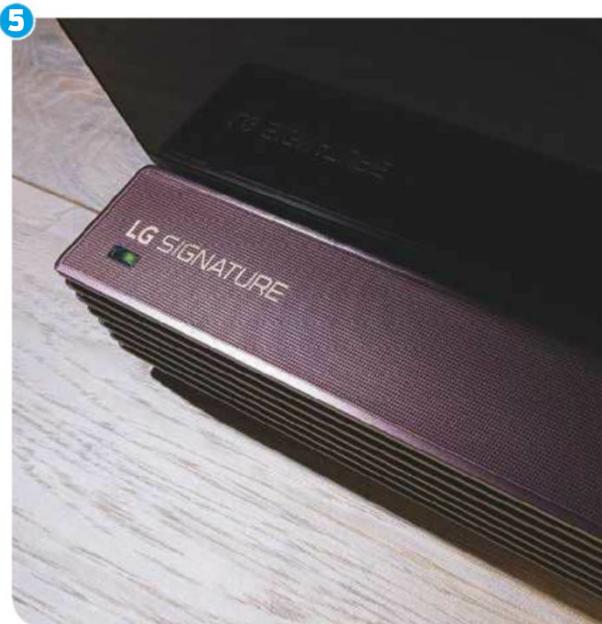
Stunning though many attributes of the OLED65G6's HDR pictures are, they do also exhibit the same weaknesses I've noticed with LG's OLED screens. First, a lack of brightness means this 65-inch can't resolve full detail and colour tone information in the brightest parts of HDR content. This can be seen most clearly in *BvS* in fiery explosions, or the flames produced by the, er, mutant.

3



4





It's worth adding here that running a USB-based clip of *Pan* provided in Dolby Vision shows that the OLED65G6 is arguably more effective with Dolby Vision than HDR 10. The Dolby picture was less bright, but colours enjoyed greater subtlety and detail clipping in bright areas was considerably reduced.

In HDR shots with a mixture of light and dark content, meanwhile, such as those featuring Lois in the Saharan camp, the darkest parts of the picture can look a little hollow and short of shadow detail. You can improve this by nudging the rather aggressive brightness setting up a point or two. Don't go higher than the 52 brightness setting though, or those lovely inky black levels will start to take a palpable hit.

The OLED65G6 also continues to show LG having one or two issues with colour noise. Some of the exterior skies in *Batman v Superman* look really quite messy and are occasionally infiltrated by momentary pinkish colour interference. Motion, too, isn't perfect, as the combination of in-frame movement and camera pans during the battle with the fiery baddie displays quite a bit of judder if you don't use LG's motion processing, yet occasional stutters if you do. These issues are largely restricted to 24fps content.

First impressions of the sound performance find it not hitting the ear with as much raw energy as I expected. Over the full duration of *Batman v Superman*'s often reference-grade soundtrack, though, it becomes clear that while the OLED65G6's speakers might not be daftly aggressive, they are noticeably smooth. They pick out detail well, deliver accurate effects placement across the front soundstage and produce an almost hi-fi quality that makes it a good option for music playback.

Setting the Standard standard

Many will be happy to trade the LG's lack of best-in-breed HDR brightness for its imperious black level delivery, which acts as a solid canvas for colours/light details to ping with impressive impact. And this same contrast performance is in evidence with regular SDR (Standard Dynamic Range) material. Switching to the Full HD Blu-ray of the Zack Snyder superhero epic, the OLED65G6 delivers an enjoyable and well-rounded performance. In fact, it does

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. **Passive 4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 resolution **HDR:** Yes. HDR 10 and Dolby Vision **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD; satellite **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB ports; Ethernet; headphone jack; RS232; optical digital audio output; CI slot; component/composite **SOUND:** 60W, 4.2-channel speaker bar **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** 'Infinite' **DIMENSIONS (WITH STAND):** 1,461(w) x 883(h) x 243(d)mm **WEIGHT (WITH STAND):** 31.7kg

FEATURES: Built-in Wi-Fi; USB/DLNA multimedia playback; WebOS 3.0 smart features; Bluetooth support; Ultra HD Premium certification; HDR Effect; Picture Mastering Engine; quad-core processor; 10 preset picture modes

PARTNER WITH



NETFLIX: Want Dolby Vision content? Then this streaming service is the place to start. Limited choice at the time of writing – *Marco Polo*, an Adam Sandler flick – but expect it to grow as the year progresses. You'll need the £9-per-month Premium plan.

rather better than that, producing what might well be the finest standard dynamic range pictures in the TV world. Whether it's with relatively bright scenes – footage of Superman's scrap with Zod – or ultra dark parts – the murder of Bruce Wayne's parents – the dynamics of the SDR *BvS* imagery present no challenge whatsoever for LG's OLED flagship, enabling it to combine those still-beautiful black levels with gorgeously natural, balanced and detailed colours. And, of course, there's no trace of backlight clouding issues either, while the clipping noticed with HDR completely vanishes.

Additionally, the OLED65G6 delivers a 3D masterclass. During a run-through of *The LEGO Movie* I was in jaw-drop mode, confronted by the awesome sense of depth, clarity and brightness the screen delivers via its passive 3D technology. Even largescale sequences like the Wild West section are mainly devoid of crosstalk ghosting problems, and there's none of the flicker and precious little of the brightness reduction you often get with rival active 3D solutions. And the low-lit car chase down the motorway retains depth and information, thanks to the screen's ability to resolve detail in dark areas and unearth all the light and contrast cues that help create a good sense of 3D space.

Prime contender

Overall, this is the best all-round TV in LG's 2016 OLED range, which makes it by default a prime contender for the year's best TV so far, period. The only issue, beyond the slightly different HDR experience you get from its less-than-1,000 nit panel compared to LED-lit rivals, is whether it's so much better than the E6 series that it justifies the extra £1,000 cost. My feeling is that unless money's no object to you, the E6 will ultimately be the more attractive option ■

HCC VERDICT



LG SIGNATURE OLED65G6

→ £6,000 → www.lg.com/uk

WE SAY: The best OLED TV LG has made to date, and a stunning option for anyone who prefers the tech's black level to LCD's brightness. But it's an expensive option.

3. The G6 exhibits the black level finesse expected from OLED

4. The TV's ultra-thin design makes its rivals look fat by comparison

5. A 4.2-driver sound system resides in the G6's plinth

AV INFO**PRODUCT:**
Floorstanding 5.1
speaker system**POSITION:**
Entry-level for Revel,
below Performa and
Ultima series**PEERS:**
DALI Opticon 5.1;
KEF R100 5.1

Mark Craven trawls his action movie back-catalogue with these second-generation Concerta speakers

Revel offers a warm welcome

The Harman group of audio brands has some big-hitting names, including Mark Levinson and JBL Synthesis, the latter creating ultra high-end home cinema systems that would be right near the top of my list if I were to win the lottery. The Revel speaker name is, I'm sure, less well known. But it's also likely to get the attention of those on more down-to-earth budgets.

Established in California in 1996 with a 'no off-the-shelf parts' ethos, Revel started out with its Ultima series of speakers and has grown its offering since. It's always been a home cinema audio company (as opposed to a hi-fi brand showing an occasional interest in AV), releasing a subwoofer and a centre channel in its first year.

Reviewed here is an array gathered together from its new Concerta2 line. The preceding Concerta range (featured in *HCC* back in 2007) also included slim-ish on-wall speakers, but Concerta2 hasn't got to that stage yet – these are full-size speakers with hefty drivers, designed for a system where audio performance is paramount and speakers are allowed to be seen as well as heard. The total cost of this 5.1 array is £4,350. Here's how that figure breaks down.

F is for floorstanders

The floorstanding speakers are the F35s that stand a shade over a metre high and sell for £1,500 a pair. Two-and-a-half-way designs, they feature a single 1in aluminium tweeter topping a trio of 5.25in cone woofers handling mid and low-frequencies.

Wrapped around the tweeter is the fourth-generation design of Revel's Acoustic Lens waveguide, which aims to improve integration with the midband driver below it by controlling directivity, and giving a light gain to frequencies around the crossover point. Similar attention has been paid to the woofer complement. Revel's product creation process involves computer-modelled design of the whole driver assembly, and the use of a patented Micro-Ceramic Composite (MCC) cone material, which it says ensures an 'ideal piston-like performance' and eliminates resonances.

The company also says that a primary aim of the floorstander design was high sensitivity – 'useful for the expected match to lower-powered multichannel receivers

and amplifiers.' This results in the choice of a third 5.25in woofer as opposed to a separate midrange, and a new crossover design to divide the two lower woofers with the upper unit. Sensitivity is rated at a high 90dB.

Note that the F35 isn't the Big Daddy of the Concerta2 range: there is also an F36 floorstander, more expensive at £1,900-per-pair, that utilises larger midbass/woofers and a bigger enclosure.

The S16 surround speakers (£450 each) are unusual as, when you first see them, you'll be convinced they're dipole speakers. They sport the same familiar half-hexagonal cabinet shape as the likes of Monitor Audio's FX models. Then you realise there are only front-firing drivers (a 6.5in midbass and a 1in tweeter). The shape is a design choice, allowing them to have a shallower body suited to wall-mounting (a neat cable-groove on the back keeps installation tidy) but maintaining cabinet volume. Our photo set arrived in white, as this is a colour option that Revel says is a popular choice for these wall-mounters. You can, of course, get them in black.

The centre channel, the C25, is fairly sizable but not a monster – it's just under 50cm wide and 27cm deep. Here, the midbass units are 5.25in, and they flank a centrally mounted tweeter. Frequency response is listed as 80Hz at -3dB. Little screw-in rubbery feet allow its curved body to sit on a flat surface without rocking. Alternatively, a dedicated stand (£175) is an option. Unlike the rear-ported F35 tower speakers, the C25 is sealed, meaning it can be placed close to your screen wall.

And then there's the subwoofer, the B10. This is a true member of the Concerta2 family, and therefore shares the same large but not offensive aesthetic. It uses a proprietary front-firing anodized aluminium 10in driver and an 800W RMS/1,600W peak amplifier. It's rear-ported, and below the port is a packed control panel, with phono inputs, crossover and gain dials, and a 0/180°

I. Finishing choices are gloss black or gloss white – our system features both



1

phase switch, joined by a row of controls (frequency, Q and level) for its onboard EQ. The latter is a feature of Revel subs, although unlike the higher-end Performa range, a direct USB input (for use with a laptop running Revel's LFO software) isn't an option here. Instead, you can get involved with a calibrated mic and analysis software (Revel's UK dealer Karma AV recommends Audio Tools) to massage the performance to your room. Not that you have to: flick the EQ switch to its 'off' position and it's withdrawn from the equation. For this audition, the sub's EQ feature went unused.

As with other speaker packages featured recently, such as DALI's Opticon line and Dynaudio's Emit series, these appear supremely well made. This is as it obviously should be when speakers cost more than a couple of hundred quid. Yet better than the solid construction is the styling and effort put into making these speakers pretty. Certainly, they feel a little imposing, especially in their black guise, and keeping the grille on does them no favours, but take a closer look and you'll see an absence of viewable driver fixings, gently curved cabinets and smooth edges.

Bass in your face

Often there's one sonic trait that's immediately apparent with speakers, before your brain starts analysing other facets. With the Revels, for me, it was the bass response. The two floorstanding F35 front speakers, and the B10 subwoofer, put in a tremendous shift between them, resulting in a sound that is robust, full-bodied and exciting in the lower registers.

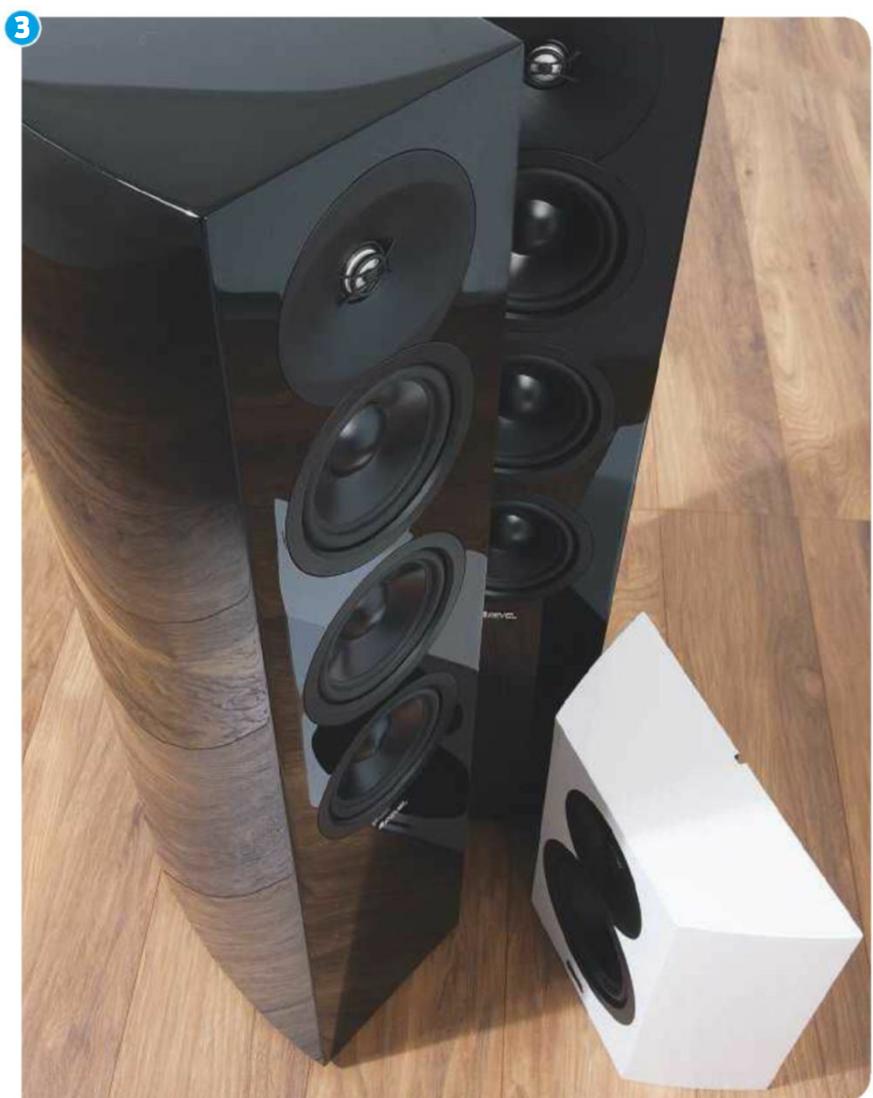
Low-frequency integration is sublime, with smooth, warm, inviting bass and hard-hitting lower slams delivered in unison. All this was in evidence with the climactic standoff/shootout/bullrun sequence in *2 Guns*. When a car is destroyed by an RPG, a brief but boisterous explosion thuds through the soundstage. Then, when

'The Revels pin you to your seat with controlled, rich bass, and crank the tension with finely-etched effects'

Denzel Washington's Agent Trench quips 'Make it rain,' and blows up another car (it's that kind of movie), the soundmix repeats the trick, before mining even lower frequencies during the eventual cattle stampede. Throw in the chest-thumping impacts of various firearms, and there's a lot of bass notes on show. What was noteworthy is that everything sounded believable and nothing felt out of place or over-egged. And it was impossible to locate where the subwoofer was coming in to pick up the slack from the F35s. There was control all the way down the frequency range.

This sequence isn't all about bass, of course. In the moments preceding the commotion, the soundmix delights in quiet FX as it captures the ambience of the outdoor location, and the Revel system delivers this well. The gentle creak of Trench's car boot being opened, and distant birdsong, tease out of the speakers and wrap you in the moment.

With *Bad Boys II*'s first big action set-piece (the Miami car chase), the Revels also prove their ability to handle a



full-scale sonic assault. Surround sound effects are insistent and impactful, with the full-range S16 speakers having poise and punch in their own right. A clunking door, a roaring car engine, Trevor Rabin's tense score, shattering glass... there's a lot going on in the mix during this sequence and the overall clarity is excellent. The Revels present it not as a mush, but as a clearly detailed whole. The roadside shootout, where hero cops Will Smith and Martin Lawrence shelter behind a police car as machine-gun fire surrounds them, benefits from this clarity and staging. Individual bullets riddle the LCR, and whip into the rear channels as the camera shifts. The S16s do feel pretty directional in their output, as opposed to the more diffuse effect of other speakers (particularly dipole designs), but that suits my taste.

A good illusion

Slowing down the pace, I dug up *Total Recall* (the remake) on Blu-ray and the scene where Quaid (Colin Farrell) goes to Rekall to have his memory implantation. This begins with a lengthy – for a Hollywood blockbuster, anyway – two-handed dialogue. As Farrell and John Cho head back and forth in their discussion of potential fake memories ('an illusion no matter how real is still an illusion'), the subtle cadences and stresses that inhabit human speech are readily apparent. By and large, it sounds like two people having a conversation in the room (though still an illusion, natch), the C25 centre speaker sharing the same revealing nature of its stablemates. My only criticism, and something that I noticed with other material, is a slight lack of depth to male voices.

While I'm looking for negatives, I also felt with both *Bad Boys II* and *Total Recall* higher frequencies missing a bit of bite, that last slice of real attack that home cinema enthusiasts crave. Yet actually *San Andreas'* core TrueHD mix assuaged my concerns; here those distinctive 1in tweeters latched on to the high-in-the-mix cracking glass and tumbling rocks during the film's opening road-side car-crash sequence and thrust them right between my ears. As the Valley Girl hangs above certain death in her beaten-up car, every falling boulder and twist of metal had me wincing in fear, the speakers showing a snappy aggression, while the whirring blades of the rescue helicopter chugged through the room.

In fact, this full-pelt movie mix found the Revel array at its most exciting, including the B10 subwoofer. The earthquake-borne destruction of downtown Los Angeles had the viewing room floor seemingly rolling under the weight of seismic bass waves. Even though the B10 claims a relatively modest low-frequency extension of 32Hz (-6dB), and uses only a single 10in woofer, I didn't really feel shortchanged, especially considering the less-than-insane price tag. And, again, the meshing of the sub with the rest of the enclosures impressed.

With music playback, the F35s, working in a stereo pair without subwoofer, show remarkable low-end poise and therefore prove a great match for bass-rich tunes. The slow percussive funk of Guns N' Roses' *If The World (Chinese Democracy CD)* slithers from these tower speakers, providing a rich undercurrent on which the varied instrumentation (including flamenco guitars and piano) can ride along. The speakers' confident timing brings clarity and rhythmic drive to the track.

Elsewhere on the same album, *Better* finds the F35s building a defined stereo soundfield, with guitars intro-ing

SPECIFICATIONS

Concerta2 F35

DRIVE UNITS: 3 x 5.25in cone midbass drivers; 1 x 1in aluminium tweeter with Acoustic Lens Waveguide **ENCLOSURE:** Bass reflex, rear-ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** From 55Hz (-3dB) **SENSITIVITY:** 90dB **POWER HANDLING:** 180W **DIMENSIONS:** 1,020(h) x 210(w) x 310(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 18.5kg

Concerta2 C25

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 5.25in cone midbass drivers; 1 x 1in aluminium tweeter with Acoustic Lens Waveguide **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** From 80Hz (-3dB) **SENSITIVITY:** 89dB **POWER HANDLING:** 120W **DIMENSIONS:** 180(h) x 490(w) x 270(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 9kg

Concerta2 S16

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 6.5in cone midbass drivers; 1 x 1in aluminium tweeter with Acoustic Lens Waveguide **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** From 70Hz (-3dB) **SENSITIVITY:** 90dB **POWER HANDLING:** 120W **DIMENSIONS:** 375(h) x 338(w) x 140(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 6.35kg

Concerta2 B10 (subwoofer)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 10in coated fibre-composite cone woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Bass reflex, rear-ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 35Hz (-3dB); 32Hz (-6dB); 29Hz (-10dB) **ON BOARD POWER:** 800W Class D amplifier **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 417(h) x 377(w) x 392(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 24kg **CONNECTIONS:** LFE input; stereo line-level input

PARTNER WITH



PRIMARE SP23: Revel distributor Karma AV also handles high-end marque Primare. Its SP23 five-channel amp may lack 4K passthrough but makes up for it with a supremely assured performance. Bag one for £3,500.

stage right and Axl Rose's vocals nailed centrally. Yet epic prog-rocker *There Was A Time*, with its crescendoic, overdriven guitar solos, perhaps finds the limits of these speakers when it comes to expressiveness. When axemen Robin Finck and Buckethead let rip, it felt as if the drivers had lost some of their authority.

Switching out of stereo and into multichannel mode, you get extra punch from the B10 and the full-range bombast of the S16s. For uncritical high-volume partying, this is a fun package.

Stylish return

I'd happily sit down to movie night with this Revel set. It has the ability to pin you to your seat with controlled, rich bass, ratchet up the tension with finely-etched effects, and unearth soundtrack details you might miss with lesser systems. The design and build get a thumbs-up too, with these speakers managing to ride a wave between stately and slick. There's a warm feeling to its output that I really like, and the B10 sub – while not the most brutal of woofers – ties the system together with assured control. Revel has returned in style ■

HCC VERDICT



Revel Concerta2 5.1

→ £4,350 → www.karma-av.co.uk

WE SAY: A delectable mix of tidy design and potent, full-bodied surround sound. Not the cheapest speakers around, but certainly worthy of your consideration.

2. Revel ports the B10 sub to tune the output of its 10in driver

3. The F35s use a trio of woofers – the bottom two LF units crossover at 575Hz

4. All the Concerta speakers feature a 1in tweeter with Acoustic Lens Waveguide

Give or take a few foibles, the HD27 is an enticing compact 1080p DLP projector. **Steve May** blows up his video

Optoma asks for less to go large



It's genuinely astonishing what you can get at the budget end of the projection market. Optoma's new HD27 is a case in point: a compact, lightweight cutie that weighs just 2.5kg, is small enough to squirrel away beneath the stairs when not in use, yet more than equipped to front a convincing home cinema system. And it sells for about a tenth of the price of a 65in OLED TV.

It's a single-chip DLP model, and has plenty of rivals in this entry-level arena, but makes an effort to stand out by virtue of neat cosmetics. The white chassis has a smart gloss finish, while the bodywork is heavily ventilated (hot air ports from the front, just the ticket for keeping your sausage rolls warm...)

A keypad on the PJ's top offers full menu access, while the rear serves up two v1.4a HDMI inputs, one of which supports MHL smartphone connectivity (the projector also



works with Optoma's WHD200 wireless HDMI streamer, an optional extra available for around £200). There's also a USB port, but this is just for device charging and servicing, plus a minijack audio output and a 12V trigger, should you want to go the whole hog and integrate the HD27 with an electric screen.

Setup is generally straightforward, but with a couple of limiting factors. Firstly, the throw distance is a tad demanding. You'll need a fair amount of space to cast a seriously big image, and courtesy of the HD27's meagre 1.1x zoom, the throw ratio is a tight 1.48-1.62:1. Secondly, both zoom and focus controls are manual. There's a zoom lever for the former, while the serrated focus ring helps pull images sharp. Built-in test patterns make it easy to zero in. Image shifting is an option, plus vertical and horizontal keystone correction. For additional alignment, the PJ's feet are adjustable.

The fittingly compact IR remote control grants access to the onscreen menus, and is helpfully backlit with blue-glowing buttons.

Optoma quotes brightness at an impressive 3,200 Lumens (the same as the previous HD26), but I still wouldn't recommend the projector for use in areas with high levels of ambient light, as it just doesn't have the punch. However, you won't need a fully dark room, either. In this instance, give yourself enough light to find your popcorn, switch the PJ onto its bright lamp setting and you'll be in business.

Casual users can stick to a selection of image presets – Cinema, Vivid, Game, Reference, Bright and User. Deeper adjustment includes the usual calibration tools of Brightness, Contrast, Sharpness, Colour, Tint and Gamma (with preset curves for film, TV and graphics work). There's enough here to bag the HD27 certification from the ISF, with Day, Night and 3D slots available.

One inevitable downside of small DLP projectors is that they're rather noisy in operation, and the HD27 is no exception. The general fan hubbub can be tamed by running the lamp in Eco mode, but even then the projector can't be described as demur.

Beneath the lid is a 195W lamp, which has an expected lifespan of 6,000 hours in Eco mode. Power consumption in Bright mode is rated at 230W, dropping to 192W in Eco.

The projector supports active 3D when used with DLP's 3D emitter accessory. This includes support for a 144Hz rapid refresh rate; however, as no such gizmo was provided this went untested.

Grey matter

Like its predecessors, this beamer doesn't really do a deep black. Dark grey is about the best you can hope for. When ice rains from the skies in *Exodus: Gods and Kings*, there's no sense of depth or scale to the battered city, while the swirling vortex above looks as flat as a Sphinx's nose. The projector has a Dynamic Black feature to adjust the lamp output on a scene-by-scene basis (automatically activated in Cinema mode), which is well judged enough

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Affordable Full HD DLP projector

POSITION:
Below the Darbee-enabled HD28DSE; above the HD26

PEERS:
BenQ W110S;
Epson EH-TW5210

1. The HD27 is Optoma's newest budget Full HD PJ

2. The remote's buttons light up blue for dark-room use



3



4

not to be a major distraction in a dark room yet doesn't noticeably improve black levels. In fact, I didn't find any mode, or gamma adjustment/settings tweak, that delivered a true black without crushing out shadow detail.

That said, there's a colourful intensity to the image which is really engaging. When Julianne Moore is engulfed in flame, only to erupt out as a dragon, in fantasy flick *Seventh Son*, the HD27 delivers an orange fireball able to singe eyebrows. Texas Instruments' BrilliantColor

'If you're shopping for a high-value bigscreen experience, Optoma's cinematic HD27 doesn't disappoint'

processing is deliciously vibrant. Perhaps key to the projector's colour performance is an improved colour wheel, although Optoma is incredibly secretive about the upgrade, saying only that a new material has been used.

Steering clear of soap opera

Image processing technology is somewhat rudimentary, but appropriate given the price point. There are no high frame-rate picture modes offered here to retain motion resolution. This is a one-video-fits-all proposition.

On the plus side, that means no video soap opera effect. Films do actually look like films. And make no mistake, the HD27 does big cinema brilliantly. As Chris Pratt high-tails it from the pen of the Indominus Rex in *Jurassic World*, the more easily distracted amongst us will find themselves appreciating the green hues of the prehistoric foliage, and how they contrast with the screens in the control room. We may be some way away from the dizzy heights of HDR, but the white hard hat of a soon-to-be-eaten park employee pings out brilliantly.

At 6.5ppf (pixels per frame), subjective motion resolution drops from 1080 lines to around 700. A test sequence devised by Japanese post-production house Q-Tec, which involves a passenger train rattling past a fixed camera, reveals passengers in each carriage,



SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active Shutter via DLP Link (glasses optional) **4K:** No. 1,920 x 1,080 resolution (Full HD) **CONNECTIONS:** 2 x HDMI inputs; 3D Sync port; minijack audio output; USB charge/service port; 12V trigger **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 3,200 Lumens **CONTRAST (CLAIMED):** 25,000:1 **ZOOM:** 1.1x optical **DIMENSIONS:** 298(w) x 230(h) x 96.5(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 2.4kg

FEATURES: Single-chip DLP projector; TI BrilliantColor; Dynamic Black image processing; 10W built-in speaker system; 195W lamp, life rated at 8,000 hours (dynamic), 6,000 hours (eco), 5,000 hours (bright); 26dB claimed operating noise; optional wireless HD transmitter; 1.48-1.62:1 throw ratio; keystone correction; lens shift; Brightness, Contrast, Sharpness, Colour, Tint and Gamma controls

PARTNER WITH



OPTOMA DS-9092PWC: Also available in a 72in (diagonal) iteration, Optoma's manual pulldown 16:9 projector screen (with self-lock feature) keeps the affordable vibe going thanks to its £70 asking price. Mount it either to your ceiling or wall.

rather than an indistinct blur. I noted some colour fringing aberration on the moving train, however.

While heavily-shadowed areas tend to flatten out, brighter sequences look terrific. When we cut to Havana in espionage sequel *Mission Impossible: Rogue Nation*, the Cuban city is bathed in tantalisingly warm sunlight, while the opulence of the Vienna Opera House later in the movie is a visual treat. Colours can oversaturate, but edging the menu-based slider down to the 10 setting seems to cure a lot of the heat.

As a single-chip model, that old DLP bugbear of rainbow fringing does raise its head, but only fleetingly in scenes of high contrast. I didn't find it intrusive, and fellow viewers didn't spot it at all.

This projector will prove a solid choice for gamers, too. Running through cartoony shooter *Overwatch* on the PlayStation 4, there was no appreciable lag to knobble my kills, and the HD27's predilection for rich colour was right at home here. Running in Game mode, I detected no overt resolution smearing. The picture was smooth and pixel-grid free. Everything played the way it should.

Budget multiplex

If you're shopping for a high-value bigscreen experience, then the HD27 doesn't really disappoint. This is a cinematic offering that's a doddle to settle up, and does a cracking job with HD content. And importantly, it's just as at home with next-gen games as it is with TV and movies. Just add a media streamer for Netflix, Amazon and YouTube, plus a sound system, and your budget multiplex is up and running. There are drawbacks, of course – the projector's innate black level is limited and that onboard sound system borders on painful – but for the money this is one home theatre offering that should have you beaming ■

HCC VERDICT



Optoma HD27

→ £550 → www.optoma.co.uk

WE SAY: This projector succeeds in its mission to offer largescale HD images at a price that won't break the bank. A solid, but not spectacular, all-round gaming and movie PJ.

3. One of the two HDMI inputs supports the MHL protocol

4. The top of the PJ offers menu navigation controls



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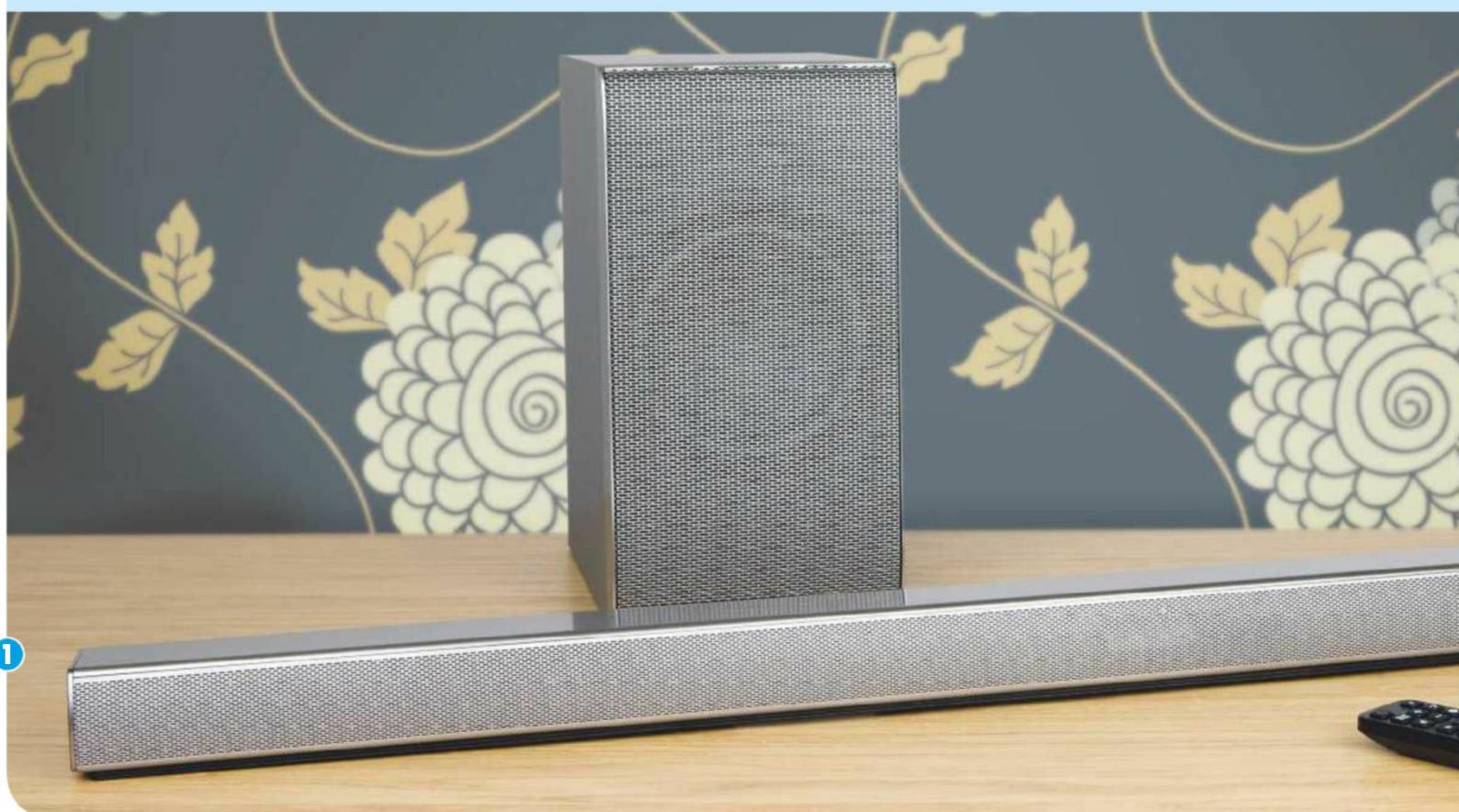
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Hi, lo silver soundbar

LG's SH7 is part multiroom speaker, part affordable home cinema audio system.

Mark Craven discovers it has a passion for high-octane sonics that requires some vigilance

WHERE ONCE THE only multiroom audio company you could think of was Sonos, these day's everyone is at it. LG calls its multiroom offering MusicFlow, a moniker appended to the name of its new SH7 soundbar system, denoting that this slinky silvery twosome can be used as part of a wider whole-house audio setup. And it has a clear immediate advantage over the Sonos PlayBar by retailing for around half the price.

Multiroom is just one tick on the SH7's reasonably impressive spec sheet. Other niceties include wireless connection with compatible LG TVs; wireless connection of subwoofer to soundbar; Bluetooth and Wi-Fi/wired music streaming (including FLAC, WAV and AIFF file format support); and a 'one-button home cinema' mode that allows two other LG MusicFlow speakers to join with the soundbar in a multichannel setting.

There are some feature shortfalls, though. HDMI connectivity is limited to a massively stingy single input and single (ARC-enabled) output. One argument here is that you can just use your TV as the source hub, routing audio out to the LG. But this means you're battling with multiple inputs on your TV, and toting two remotes. One extra HDMI input (at least) would be nice. Additionally, the HDMI is v1.4 standard, taking 4K passthrough off the menu. The 'bar will pass 3D Blu-rays, though.

There's no onscreen menu system, video multimedia file playback, or smart TV portal. This must be the first LG product I've looked at in ages without BBC iPlayer.

The lack of onscreen menus means network setup is done via LG's MusicFlow smartphone app. This syncs to the SH7 via Bluetooth, and then guides you through Wi-Fi connection (involving a button press on a Wi-Fi button on the 'bar's rear). The app itself is easy to use, and integrates Spotify, GoogleCast, Napster, TuneIn, Deezer and Google Play Music.

Day-to-day control is through LG's small, black remote. This is pretty easy to master (and includes access to a lip-sync feature), but does require you to scroll through 'Functions' rather than offering one-touch source selection.

LG's double act

The soundbar part of the SH7 is long and slender, and makes for a good fit with a 65in set. Within its enclosure reside two woofers and two tweeters, size unspecified. The 200W subwoofer (again, driver size unspecified) is a little less glamorous, but won't be hard to find space for.

Multiple sound presets that don't seem to make much of a difference can get tiresome, so props due to LG for giving SH7 users a choice of just three – ASC, Standard and Cinema. As the supplied manual is no help whatsoever,

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Soundbar/sub
with multiroom

POSITION:
The more powerful
SH8 sits above it

PEERS:
Philips HTL-5140;
Q Acoustics Media 4;
Canton DM 9



you'll need to go online to discover that ASC stands for Adaptive Sound Control, a jazzy new LG signal processing feature that promises to analyze frequency levels in real-time and adjust the bar's output to provide an 'optimum' mix. Standard, presumably, leaves things unfettered. Cinema mode – well, we can guess what that's about. There are also bass and treble adjustments, plus subwoofer level control. The latter turns out to be very useful...

First impressions of the 'bar are so-so. With music material (*The Next Episode* – Dr Dre, *Hurt* – Johnny Cash) it sounds tight and controlled, with a rich, punchy bottom end and clarity with vocals. Yet it also sounds a bit restrained and shut in, lacking both horizontal dispersion and the ability to project out into the room.

It turns out that ASC is the default sound mode. Switching to Standard didn't make any discernible difference, but Cinema mode has a massive impact. The effect here is as if the soundbar's drivers have been unmuzzled and its onboard amps kicked awake from their slumber. The soundstage expands outwards, bass gains depth, and it becomes appreciably louder.

It's an impressive feat of sonic engineering, but the more time I spent with the SH7 the more I felt that even the boisterousness of its Cinema mode was disguising some limitations.

With Michael Mann's cyber-thriller *Blackhat*, the bright, crisp nature of its high-frequency delivery becomes quite jarring. When Chris Hemsworth is dragged from his prison cell early on, clanking metal doors and clicked-on handcuffs were prominent. I've found LG home cinema products in the past having somewhat splashy, indistinct HF presentation; here, the opposite is true. Conversation between Hemsworth and the prison warden, while easy to follow, suffers from colouration and lacks a sense of naturalness.

At the other end of the frequency range, the subwoofer reveals itself to be a bit of a wild beast, and over-dominant

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x midrange drivers; 2 x tweeters **AMPLIFICATION (CLAIMED):** 360W **CONNECTIONS:** 1 x HDMI input (v1.4); 1 x HDMI output (v1.4); 1 x optical digital audio input; 1 x 3.5mm audio input; 1 x Ethernet **DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD MA:** No **SEPARATE SUBWOOFER:** Yes. Wireless **REMOTE CONTROL:** Yes **DIMENSIONS:** 1,060(w) x 53(h) x 85(d)mm (soundbar); 171(w) x 320(h) x 252(d)mm (subwoofer) **WEIGHT:** 2.8kg (soundbar); 4.3kg (subwoofer)

FEATURES: Adaptive Sound Control (default)/Standard/Cinema sound effect modes; bass, treble and subwoofer adjustments; Bluetooth; Wi-Fi; MP3, ALAC, WAV, WMA, Ogg Vorbis, AIFF, FLAC (to 192kHz) music file playback; Dolby Digital and DTS; Android/iOS mobile device app; compatible with LG MusicFlow multiroom; one-button home cinema feature; Night mode; Dynamic Range Control

PARTNER WITH



LG MUSICFLOW H7: The H7 is the biggest of the standalone speakers in LG's multiroom range, and fits four drivers (arranged in stereo config) into its almost hexagonal chassis. Dressed in silver to match LG's other kit, it sells for around £350.

in the mix. I'm the sort that usually turns subs up, but here I found myself getting all the way down to -12 in the search for nice integration. The opening computer virus POV sequence in *Blackhat* features masses of low, foreboding bass notes, and the SH7 sub chucks them out with gusto. It's simultaneously surprising and overpowering.

This combination of booming low-end and razor-sharp highs meant I found myself switching back to ASC mode, yearning for a sound with a little more balance so I could forget about the 'bar and actually focus attention on the movie. And it did certainly help, damping down on the frequency extremes and tying the soundstage together. On the other hand, it lost some of its excitement.

Don't get me wrong: the SH7 can, at times, sound excellent for an affordable soundbar. But my enjoyment varied from one source to another, and required regular EQ tweaks. Gangster rap silliness *Ryda*, by The Game, showed the sub's musical talents and room-filling ability, and the 'bar matched it with pleasing, tinkly synthesiser notes. Similarly, general daytime TV viewing (Sky News, repeats of UK sitcom *Coupling*) benefitted from very clean dialogue delivery.

Volume control is another element to treat with care. Although it offers steps from 0-100 (at which point the bar's behind-the-grille display proudly proclaims 'MAX'), range too high and it can become an uncomfortable listen. I found the SH7 worked best at low/moderate levels, where the scale-adding depth of the sub still shines through.

Not a home cinema home run from LG, then, but still a relatively affordable soundbar with positive points. I preferred the sound quality here to previous, more expensive LG models. Potential buyers should prepare for plenty of fiddling, though ■

HCC VERDICT



LG MusicFlow SH7

→ £300 → www.lg.com/uk

WE SAY: The stocked feature list hides a few omissions and sound quality varies wildly depending on source and setup. Yet the SH7 still has its charms, not to mention multiroom support

1. For easy setup, the 'bar and sub connect wirelessly



Yamaha's top-flight AVR has a bulging spec list, nine power amps and UK tuning. **Richard Stevenson** brings his UK ears to the party

The DSP diva

The RX-A3060 bursts at the seams. From headline acts like DTS:X decoding to Yamaha's MusicCast multiroom tech, it is seriously loaded. Licensing fees for the big-buck features alone must account for a fair proportion of its not insignificant £2,000 asking price. DTS, Dolby, AirPlay, DSD, Apple Lossless and a host of streaming services tick all the must-have boxes for a hero AVR.

It doesn't lack for goodies underneath the lid, either. Yamaha's new flagship offers 11.2-channel decoding and processing allied to nine channels of amplification rated at 150W (eight Ohm, 20Hz-20kHz, two-channel measurement). D-to-A conversion is handled by ESS's Sabre32 DACs; these devices are to hi-fi audiophiles what George Lucas is to cinema fans. The sound is further enhanced, says Yamaha, by its Aventage series chassis engineering, which includes an H-shaped cross frame, centralised fifth foot and double-bottom construction.

**AV INFO**

PRODUCT:
Networked nine-channel AVR with Atmos/DTS:X

POSITION:
Yamaha's flagship AVR for 2016

PEERS:
Pioneer SC-LX89;
Arcam FMJ AVR550

1. The RX-A3060 features Yamaha's usual Aventage styling

2. The remote control looks familiar, too



Now, while some companies may claim a product has been UK tuned by wafting an early sample over here for an engineer to give the thumbs-up, not so Yamaha. Its UK team has spent many months fettling the sonic delights of the RX-A3060 – I can confirm they have the bleary eyes and pasty complexion of a Summer spent in a windowless demo room to prove it.

The spec sheet can afford to have few omissions at this level, so 4K upscaling and HDMI 2.0a/HDCP support is a given. There are eight HDMI inputs and two outputs – only the front input isn't HDCP 2.2-enabled. There's passthrough for HDR video, and the HDMI passthrough on standby feature is handy when your TV viewing doesn't need to raise the roof with surround sound. A suite of video processing features is also offered; you can tweak to your visual pleasure and save to one of six presets.

Networking is via hardwired Ethernet or Wi-Fi (using a small rear-mounted antenna) and features Wireless Direct playback. Yamaha's Compressed Music Enhancer function promises to breathe life back into lossy MP3s and Bluetooth inputs, while at the other end of the spectrum the High-Res music enhancer upsamples CD and FLAC files to 96kHz/24-bit. There is comprehensive zone control for

up to four zones, a dedicated zone GUI and a Party Mode that plays the same source in every zone. Rock on.

Other connections are relatively frugal compared to flagship AVRs of a few years ago, but that is probably much to do with HD unifying video behind HDMI, and music sources moving towards streaming. For component video you get a trio of inputs and one output (more a nod to the US market, perhaps), while five analogue video inputs via composite should cater for all your legacy needs. The suite is complete with six digital inputs, three of each flavour, FM/AM antenna connections and a solitary USB Type A socket on the front. Perhaps surprisingly, there is no multichannel analogue input. I would have liked to have seen a Type B asynchronous USB input, too. That would have allowed you to stream from a PC straight into those Sabre32 DACs. I guess you can't have everything.

Choose your weapon

The 11 sets of speaker terminals hint at more amplifier channels than there really are, yet affords much flexibility in how you configure your system. Running 'Presence' channels, bi-amping the front end or using them as high-level outputs in other zones are all a possibility.



3

Selecting from the options in the GUI is relatively easy thanks to clear room pictures. If your speaker setup looks roughly like the setup in the picture, that's the one to go for.

It's a shame there aren't two more channels of power (he said, fondly remembering the Yamaha Z11) as enjoying the full-fat Atmos/DTS:X experience with the RX-A3060 will require another stereo amp. Perhaps several if you are running any of the internal amps for powered multi-zone as well. It's not a deal breaker but it does stop the RX-A3060

'The RX-A3060 delivers one of the most even-handed and sophisticated AV receiver sounds around'

being a neat one-stop shop for 7.1.4 surround sound. Denon will be releasing an 11-channel AVR soon; it's an area where Yamaha may want to have a rethink.

No Yamaha receiver would be complete without a raft of DSP modes and the RX-A3060 is no exception. It boasts the brand's top-spec Cinema DSP HD3 processing, and no less than 27 different DSP modes, from basement bars to classical concert halls for music, and from Sci-Fi to Sport for video sound. As part of the package you also get a variety of virtual presence speaker modes.

The GUI and remote will be pretty familiar to anyone who has played with a Yamaha AVR over the last few years and that makes it feel a little dated to me. The sidebar scrolling menus and pop-ups are nice but we have seen them all before. On the plus side, Yamaha's dedicated AV Setup app will help out with the basics of wiring, and day-to-day control can be handled by the AV Controller app. This is visually appealing and straightforward to use. It's also much easier to read in a darkened home cinema room than tiny writing on the near microscopic remote control buttons.

The RX-A3060 is supplied with Yamaha's setup mic with 3D stand, allowing it to map radial and height angles of every speaker for even better room EQ. The implementation here of YPAO (Yamaha Parametric [Room] Acoustic Optimiser) offers multipoint measurement for multiple seating positions, reflected sound control and YPAO volume, which changes the EQ dynamically with sound pressure level. Plug in the mic, start the auto setup and a few mic manoeuvres later you are ready to roll.

All systems go!

Following the YPAO setup the default to just about every shape and size of audio processing or feature, from basic room EQ to virtual presence channels, is set to 'on'. A cruise through the menus took a little while to rein in all

4



the audio trickery so I could hear what the Yamaha can do natively. To avoid being wooed by proper height channels, I started my tests in vanilla 7.1.

Firstly, hats off to yet another staggeringly good iteration of YPAO. Its relatively simple setup routine belies its complexity in execution, delivering a channel balance and delay structure I didn't once tweak – not even a little bit. For me, it was spot on, giving an even balance, solid bass without being OTT on the subwoofer channel and a big, enveloping sound all round.

Edge of Tomorrow's native DTS-HD MA soundtrack offers a superb mix of dialogue, atmospheric effects and voluminous audio sequences and the Yamaha delivered in spades. Through the battle scenes there is a good sense of three-dimensional action as the quad-copter drop-ships fly overhead – and this is without height channel speakers, remember. Bass is tightly controlled and even glassy high-frequency effects avoid being bright or uncomfortable even at serious listening levels.

Tom Cruise's distinctive dialogue is accurately portrayed and there is a good sense of clarity and definition throughout every channel and effect. There is no one facet of the Yamaha's sound that steps ahead of the game and takes the lead. The RX-A3060 simply delivers a very good sound all round, and that makes for a very easy listen. It will lure you in and another few hours will have passed as another set of credits roll. Arguably, I would like a little more space in the soundstage, perhaps a slightly edgier performance at the top end or perhaps bass that plays a little more fast and loose. That would give the RX-A3060 much more character for sure, but would start to make it more of an AVR for AVR fans rather than movie lovers.

Adding four overhead height channels, using separate power amplifiers, necessitated another run of the YPAO setup. The result was more of the same great balance, only with greater 3D height and steering precision. Using the Dolby Atmos mix on *Mad Max: Fury Road*, the additional channels delivered an immediate upgrade in both the size of the soundfield and placement of effects, while comfortably retaining the Yamaha's even and refined balance. This film can be harsh on speakers and your ears at high volumes, but the only drama here was just as the director intended.

A couple of weeks spent with the RX-A3060 and I was suitably impressed with its measured approach and involving sound. It's smooth, detailed and goes loud

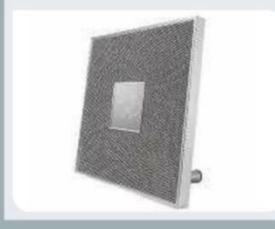


SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY ATMOS: Yes **DTS:X:** Yes **THX:** No **POWER OUTPUT (CLAIMED):** 9 x 150W (8 Ohms) **HDMI:** 8 x inputs; 2 x outputs **AV INPUTS:** 5 x composite; 0 x S-video; 6 x digital audio (3 x optical and 3 x coaxial) **ANALOGUE MULTICHANNEL INPUT:** No **MULTICHANNEL OUTPUT:** Yes. 11.2-channel processing **MULTIROOM:** Yes. Zones 2, 3 and 4 **VIDEO UPSCALING:** Yes. To 2160p **DIMENSIONS:** 435(w) x 192(h) x 474(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 18.1kg

FEATURES: Built-in Wi-Fi and Bluetooth; Ethernet; Yamaha YPAO EQ; Cinema DSP HD3 processing; 27 DSP modes; ESS Sabre32 DACs; Apple OS and Android control apps; music streaming service support (Spotify, Napster, Qobuz etc); MusicCast multiroom audio; AirPlay; dedicated Zone GUI; 3D setup mic; Aventage chassis design; HDCP 2.2/BT.2020 passthrough; HDMI standby passthrough; USB; DLNA

PARTNER WITH



YAMAHA ISX-80: The RX-A3060 AVR brings you into Yamaha's MusicCast multiroom audio eco-system. These £400 on-wall/desktop wireless speakers make smart-looking additions to other zones. Control is via both app and handset.

on command without stress. Yet maybe it can be a bit, well, 'safe' for someone with a penchant for HF effects that can ripple skin and LFE that can bounce the neighbours clean out of their beds. I mentioned this to Yamaha and was given one simple suggestion... 'try the DSP modes.'

Everything I know and feel about artificial audio DSP shouts 'No, don't do it!', but as Yamaha pretty much invented cinematic DSP modes for the home, it had to be worth a try. And, blimey, maybe I'm a convert. Using the Sci-Fi DSP mode with *Edge of Tomorrow* felt like taking the safety catch off of the RX-A3060. The soundstage swelled in all directions, creating enormous-scale action. It massively bolstered the acoustic ambience of scenes, from the intensity of being inside the quad-copter dropship to the airy space of the hydro-dam. Moreover, the Yamaha doesn't do this at the expense of coherence, and there was none of the phasey colouration and echoey-weirdness I remember from DSP modes of old.

The other DSP modes on offer give an entertaining variety of effects. Even those that are right out there in terms of what they add to the mix (Action, for instance) offer adjustable parameters for the likes of DSP gain, effective room size, initial delay and rear delay. This allows you to fine tune anywhere between subtle and bonkers. I could happily watch most action movies in the Sci-Fi DSP mode with barely a look at its settings. Is this what the director intended? Well, given it sounds bigger, more spacious, more dramatic and more enjoyable, it might well be.

If all that DSP is not for you, then the RX-A3060 still delivers one of the most even-handed and sophisticated AVR sounds around. Add in its hefty feature set and gorgeous design and it's easily worthy of being Yamaha's top-of-the-range receiver ■

HCC VERDICT



Yamaha RX-A3060

→ £2,000 → uk.yamaha.com

WE SAY: Yamaha's flagship AVR offers features aplenty and a balanced sound that draws you into movies. Switch to DSP and it shoots to thrill, too!

58 XBOX ONE S / FROM £250



2



Microsoft makes **John Archer** happy by adding 4K features to its latest console

Xbox One ups its game

From our AV perspective, the Xbox One and PS4 couldn't have come out at a worse time. Why? Because neither launched with any Ultra HD/4K support whatsoever, even though 4K TVs were already available and most sensible industry pundits (even me) were predicting an imminent explosion in 4K TV sales.

So problematic has this resolution gap between the new consoles and latest TVs become that it's forced both Microsoft and Sony to introduce substantial 4K-friendly hardware upgrades to their console ranges, only a couple of years into their current 'cycles'. The first of these upgrades to hit the street is the Xbox One S. A release date for Sony's revamped PlayStation 4 is still unknown.

Aesthetically, the Xbox One S is worlds apart from the original Xbox One. It's significantly smaller (despite one-upping the original console by squeezing in an internal power supply block), and it adopts an appealing matte white finish in place of the slightly fussy two-tone gloss/matte black finish of the original.

Connections are easier to access, too, and they include a new HDCP 2.2-equipped HDMI output capable of delivering not just 4K video but HDR 4K video to compatible TVs. There's also a new port for adding an optional IR blaster so you can use the Xbox One S to control other components in your AV setup.

The connections no longer include immediate support for Microsoft's ill-fated Kinect motion/voice detection device, which might annoy people who like to control their console via voice command. If this is you, though, fear not: an optional USB Kinect adaptor is available.

4K three-way

Hunting for 4K sources to make use of the new 4K-capable HDMI turns up three results. The most welcome from a home cinema perspective is the built-in Ultra HD Blu-ray player. This makes the 500GB Xbox One S (available from September 22 for £250) look an absolute steal for AV fans, considering that the cheapest standalone Ultra HD Blu-ray deck (minus games playback capabilities) costs £350. There's also a 1TB version (£300) arriving at the same time; I tested the £350 2TB box, which launched in August.

The Xbox One S's second 4K source is streaming. At the time of writing the Netflix app supported 4K, while a 4K version of Amazon is expected soon. Neither app supports

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Games console with Ultra HD Blu-ray/4K streaming

POSITION:
Premium Xbox offering, above the still-on-sale original Xbox One

PEERS:
Sony PlayStation 4

HDR, though. Microsoft assures me that the necessary firmware updates will roll out somewhere down the line.

The final 4K source is 4K gaming. Kind of. The thing is, pretty much inevitably, the console doesn't carry the necessary processing brains to suddenly start delivering native 4K games. But it does carry a built-in upscaling engine that outputs the console's native 1080 or, more often, 960p titles at 4K resolution. You might question the necessity of this feature, given that your 4K display will do its own upscaling. But experience with Blu-ray players and my Sky Q box suggests that upscaling at source often delivers better results.

Aside from these 2,160p-flavoured treats, spec differences between the Xbox One S and the original console are pretty limited. Microsoft has provided small upgrades to the S console's GPU and CPU power, mostly with an eye on supporting HDR gaming, and these tweaks also help the Xbox One S deliver slight frame rate improvements with some titles (although from my experience the impact of these marginal frame rate boosts is limited-to-negligible for the vast majority of your gaming time).

The addition of HDR to gaming, though, could have a huge impact. Unfortunately no titles that support HDR were available at the time of writing; the first such title, *Forza Horizon 3*, is due out on September 27, with *Gears of War 4* out on October 11. Given how easily I've grown to love HDR movie viewing, I'm practically salivating at the prospect of HDR in a gaming environment.

The star of the show

For 4K-starved AV fans, the Ultra HD Blu-ray player is the Xbox One S's star attraction. But can it really be any good at such a cheap price and within a games console context? Yes, it can.

First up, while I've heard reports of other owners suffering with playback issues, I tried more than a dozen different Ultra HD Blu-ray discs in my Xbox One S and all ➤

played absolutely fine. And by fine, I actually mean better than expected when it comes to picture quality.

Focusing on *The Revenant* UHD BD, the Xbox One S delivers the sort of involving experience from HDR that I'd hoped to see, with extreme-contrast shots, like the early one of a hut on fire against a night sky, enjoying markedly richer colours and a much greater luminance range than the Blu-ray version. The Xbox One S's HDR impact was certainly on a par with that of the Samsung K8500, though the Panasonic UB900 UHD BD deck's colours remain slightly more refined and eye-catching.

I was also relieved to find the Xbox One S suffering with no more judder than rival dedicated UHD BD machines. The swift camera pans during the scene where Fitzgerald rants at Glass, while stashing pelts following the attack by Native Americans, maintained its fluidity.

Nor were there any dataflow stuttering problems of the sort I've seen with console video playback systems in the past, and nor did I see any of the grain or noise issues sometimes witnessed on the original Xbox One's Blu-ray player.

Subjectively, 4K BD pictures look just slightly softer than those of Samsung and Panasonic's dedicated decks. This is a difference that's noticeable in a slightly less gritty, grubby look to *The Revenant*'s facial close-ups. But this is a small point, and you're never in doubt that you're witnessing the glories of UHD in action.

The console sounds absolutely fine with *The Revenant* too, producing the film's subtle effects, scary groans and screams and atmospheric score with authority and clarity. *The Revenant* UHD BD does not, though, have a Dolby Atmos soundtrack. This is handy for the Xbox One S given that the console doesn't support either Atmos or DTS:X object-based sound formats.

Microsoft says it's exploring introducing a potential Atmos update, but this sounds too vague to me to be considered a done deal. And for many HCC readers, that's a big fly in the ointment. UHD HDR and next-gen soundmixes go hand in hand in a cutting-edge system. In this regard, the Xbox One S currently doesn't cut it. And, just so you know, Dolby Vision HDR isn't supported either.

Away from physical discs (it will also spin BDs and DVDs, naturally – but not 3D BDs), Microsoft's new console is an accomplished streamer. The Netflix 4K app delivers strong 4K pictures with minimal compression artefacts and excellent stability – by which I mean the level of compression doesn't tend to fluctuate over a good broadband connection, and I experienced practically no buffering or stuttering issues.

With games, the Xbox One S provides startling improvement to graphics delivered through its onboard

SPECIFICATIONS

4K: Yes. Ultra HD Blu-ray output; 4K streaming output; games upscaled to 4K (but not native) **HDR:** Yes. HDR10 **HARD DRIVE CAPACITY:** 500GB/1TB/2TB depending on model **CONNECTIONS:** 1x HDMI input; 1x HDMI output; 2x USB inputs; digital optical audio output; IR output; Ethernet **DIMENSIONS:** 431.8(w) x 112(h) x 290(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 3.2kg

FEATURES: Built-in power supply unit; HDCP 2.2/HDMI 2.0a; 4K/60Hz support; streaming service support (including Netflix 4K and, after promised firmware, Amazon 4K); vertical positioning; Kinect support via optional adaptor; backwards compatible with Xbox One games; external device hookup via HDMI

PARTNER WITH



FORZA HORIZON 3: Due to hit shops late September, this open-world souped-up driving title will offer HDR visuals to go with its more than 350 cars, numerous game modes and multiplayer options. Available for pre-order, priced £43.

4K upscaling. The beefed-up visuals from the Xbox One S are vastly cleaner and crisper than those I got when playing the same games output at 1080p through an original Xbox One, even when I was using a TV as good at upscaling as Samsung's UE65KS9500. On more affordable 4K TVs the difference in quality is even more pronounced.

The middle man

Ultimately, you can argue that the Xbox One S falls between two stools. It doesn't offer enough extra grunt to tempt current Xbox One owners to upgrade, and looks too 'lightweight' versus Microsoft's more powerful Project Scorpio console (full specs and price unknown, release date rumoured 2017) to tempt people who don't own Xbox Ones already.

From a wider home entertainment viewpoint, though, its price and 4K capabilities would appear to make it a no-brainer for anyone who owns a 4K TV but who hasn't yet bought an Ultra HD Blu-ray player. But only if they're not interested in Dolby Atmos and DTS:X audio. So some AV-hedz will love this, others won't ■

HCC VERDICT



Xbox One S

→ From £250 → www.xbox.com

WE SAY: The addition of 4K playback to the Xbox One platform makes this a bargain for anyone interested in Ultra HD Blu-ray, but lack of Atmos/DTS:X could be a deal-breaker.



3. The HDMI input means the Xbox One S will act as a hub for a set-top box

CITY HOME CINEMAS

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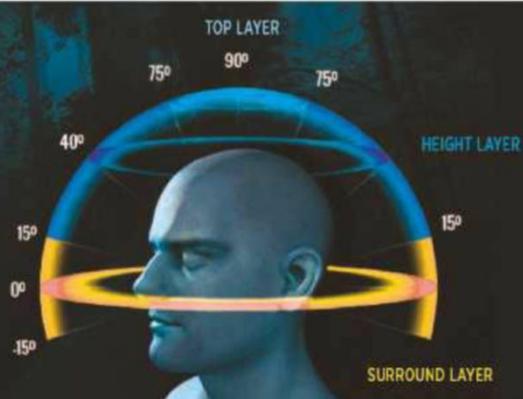
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MAKING MOVIE GOING AN OCCASION



Here Aego again

Acoustic Energy updates its Aego compact speaker line to include a soundbar/subwoofer duo. **Mark Craven** wonders if good things can come in small packages

ACOUSTIC ENERGY'S AEGO Sound3ar (so named because it's part of the company's third-generation Aego range) makes a great first impression. This £200 audio booster has the style charm to appear more expensive. The black grilles, aluminium trim and rounded edges on both its subwoofer and soundbar mix together well.

Where it does betray its price tag is in terms of size. This is a compact combo, easily dwarfed by the likes of Sony's HT-NT5 (p72). You can wield the soundbar in one hand. Clearly, Acoustic Energy has set its sights on mass-market buyers wanting a sonic partner to a mid-sized living room display or second room TV. Those after largescale sound thrills should probably take their business elsewhere.

Passive aggressive

This setup is slightly unusual (or dare I say, old-school) in that the soundbar is essentially a passive speaker, with all amplification and connectivity housed in its subwoofer brethren. This makes sense when you consider that elsewhere in the Aego range is a 2.1 system using the same sub, and the same 2in oval-shaped speaker drivers in its stereo pair. That product (Aego³) is the same price, too.

The soundbar measures 50cm across, and sits on your TV cabinet at an upfiring angle. Alternatively, it can be wall-mounted to face directly outwards. It's a two-channel design, and wires to the sub via a supplied phono cable. The subwoofer is similarly svelte (19.5cm wide) and will slip into all but the

most cramped of systems unnoticed. Just remember that the sub, rather than the 'bar, offers the system's display panel and will need line-of-sight to receive commands from Acoustic Energy's tiddly remote. Around the back of the woofer are optical



digital audio and 3.5mm stereo minijack inputs for source hookup. Bluetooth connectivity is also an option; HDMI, on the other hand, isn't.

Up to the job

While I wasn't expecting room-shaking, ear-searing sonics from the Acoustic Energy, I was hoping for something that sounded clearly better than the in-built speakers in my TVs (both a 65in Samsung and a 32in Panasonic). And, happily, that's what I got.

This little system has the low-end weight that modern tellies generally only dream of, and bolstered by the rumblings of the subwoofer, the speaker bar, which comes in at 250Hz, manages to craft a sound that feels bigger than its dimensions suggest. With my bedroom set, everything from breakfast news to late-night Olympic broadcasts suddenly sound more real, with voices gaining authority.

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVERS: 2 x 2in oval midrange drivers

AMPLIFICATION (CLAIMED): 70W

CONNECTIONS: 1 x optical digital audio input; 1 x stereo minijack input; 2 x phono speaker-level outputs

DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD MA: No/No

SEPARATE SUB: Yes, 6in driver.

REMOTE CONTROL: Yes **DIMENSIONS:** 70(h) x 500(w) x 70(d)mm (soundbar); 350(h) x 195(w) x 307(d)mm (subwoofer)

WEIGHT: N/A

FEATURES: Bluetooth; bass level adjustment; optical, phono and 3.5mm cables supplied

The subwoofer acts as the connections/power hub

Nor is the subwoofer a one-note wonder – the disco/funk tracks that litter the *Beverly Hills Cop* soundtrack find it carrying the tuneful basslines and kickdrums.

Sticking with that '80s actioner, the Sound3ar shows a nice balance between sub and bar, and enough clarity in the mid and upper frequencies to make the truck chase in the opening act, and the mansion shootout towards its end, engrossing movie moments. It's eager to please too, favouring dynamic punch over subtlety, to the point where it can sound a little brash.

A drawback to the Sound3ar is that there's little users can do to tweak its output. A four-step bass-level adjustment (plus volume, obviously) is all you get, and as the maximum setting is overblown with some material and the minimum too thin, you're really only going to be switching between two options. And the sub simply doesn't have the muscle to impress in terms of depth.

Additionally, the soundstage here is predictably narrow. While I like the energetic feel of the system, I wouldn't have minded more horizontal dispersion and stereo imaging. This is perhaps a bigger shame with music, as it certainly has the punch and tone to work well with streamed tunes.

These limitations don't detract much from the Sound3ar's positives, which are its robust dialogue, well-rounded lows and neat design. Worth checking out if money/space is tight ■

HCC VERDICT



Acoustic Energy Aego Sound3ar

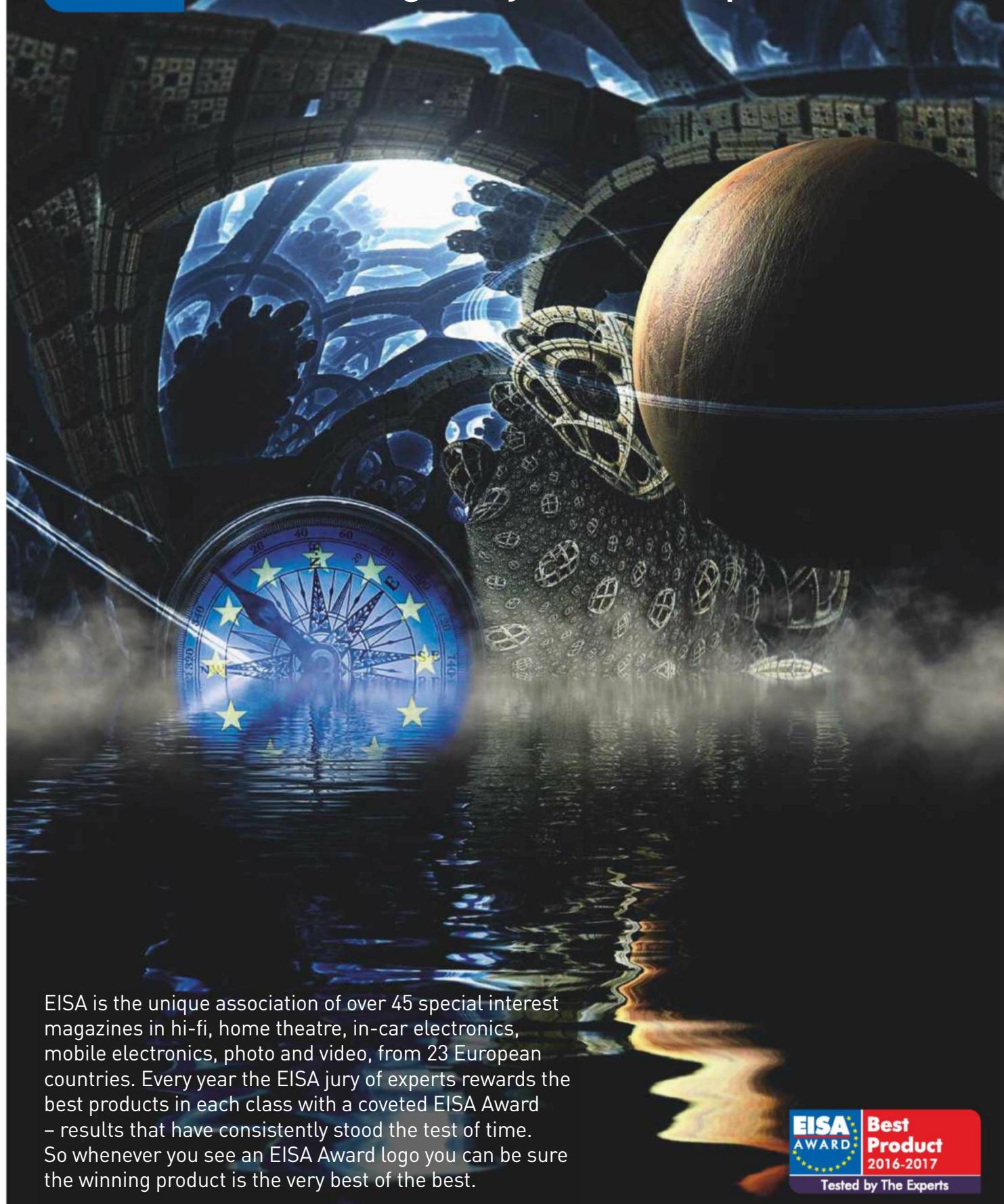
→ £200 → www.acoustic-energy.co.uk

WE SAY: Smart design, agreeable dimensions and a decent performance make this 2.1 system a solid second-room option.



EISA AWARDS 2016-17

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Pixel polisher

John Archer knows that not all 4K TVs are created equal. This is where DVDO's latest HDMI upscaler comes into play with standard-def and HD material



WHILE 4K/ULTRA HD televisions have been around for years now, native 4K sources are still relatively scarce. Especially if you can't afford an Ultra HD Blu-ray player, the new Sky Q Silver box and subscription UHD service, and/or Netflix and Amazon 4K streaming.

Cue the DVDO iScan Mini 4K scaler. Plug an HDMI source into this tiny box (which is small enough to be attached to your TV's rear) and it can apply VRS ClearView image processing technology, developed by Silicon Image, to that source before passing the pictures to your 4K TV.

Your TV will carry out its own upscaling, of course, but the idea is that the iScan Mini's VRS engine should do a better job – especially

if that telly isn't a high-end model.

The iScan Mini doesn't just work with 4K screens, mind you. It can scale sources to a huge variety of display resolutions and refresh rates, including multiple PC screen monitor resolutions and 1080 HD. So it could work with an HD display.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
External HDMI-based 4K scaler

POSITION:
The higher end of two iScan products, above the smaller iScan Micro

PEERS:
The internal scalers in BD decks/TVs

Onscreen menus let you manually adjust scaling strength; call in mosquito noise reduction and noise smoothing for standard-definition sources; select the level of detail and edge enhancement; opt to suppress the 'ringing' effect that commonly arrives with artificially sharpened content; and reduce the 'harshness' of the iScan's upscaled pictures.

The Mini can strip out the audio from an HDMI feed and output it via S/PDIF to an AV receiver, and even lets you edit its EDID – the way DVDO's device emulates the information from your TV's HDMI.

Time to sharpen up

Feeding the *Coraline* Blu-ray through the iScan Mini into a high-end Samsung UE65KS9500 4K TV (reviewed next issue), the Mini's 'Low' Enhancement mode preset only delivered a small – but still noticeable – improvement in sharpness over the TV's own scaling.

The Mini's High enhancement setting, though, has a dramatic effect, making even the Samsung's excellent upscaled picture (and that of a Panasonic UB900 UHD Blu-ray player) look notably softer and less detailed, as well as less deep. These improvements, though, are accompanied by distracting fizzing grain over *Coraline*'s beautifully rendered puppet faces, plus gentle ringing around very

SPECIFICATIONS

CONNECTIONS: 1x HDMI 2.0 input (with MHL); 1x HDMI 2.0 output; 1x USB; 1x DC input; 1x mini jack for IR receiver dongle; 1x optical digital audio output

OUTPUT RESOLUTION: Up to 4K (4,096 x 2,180, 30fps)

HDR PASSTHROUGH: No

DIMENSIONS: 63(w) x 20(h) x 80(d)mm

WEIGHT: 0.91kg

FEATURES: Test patterns; split off audio to S/PDIF; High and Low enhancement modes; Auto/manual rescale settings; sharpness and edge enhancement adjustment; TV EDID adjustment; split-screen demo mode

defined objects like the 'Other Mother's' skeletal form and metallic fingers.

The negative side effects aren't as severe as might have been expected given the extent of the detail enhancement, and the iScan Mini does let you tweak elements of the processing to suit. Personally, though, I just found the iScan's Low preset and the Samsung TV's own upscaling more natural.

This gizmo is probably better used with 'mainstream' 4K TVs. It delivered a marked improvement in Blu-ray picture quality on both a budget Finlux 4K TV and a lower mid-range Panasonic DX650. *Coraline*'s images appeared sharper, cleaner and more nuanced.

It also upcales standard-definition sources to 4K far better than any 4K TV I've seen, so is great for those occasions when SD really can't be avoided. And although it needs a 4K display to unlock its full potential, the iScan Mini upcales DVDs to 1080p (still the choice resolution of many home cinema projectors) with aplomb.

The one-in-one-out HDMI stage won't pass UHD HDR signals as it doesn't support HDCP 2.2; my Panasonic UB900 Ultra HD Blu-ray player wouldn't recognise it as a '4K HDR display device' at all. This isn't really an issue, though.

Target market

The iScan Mini isn't for everyone. If you've got plenty of high-quality 4K sources or a really top-end 4K TV, it probably won't justify its £275 cost. For anyone with a relatively cheap or even mid-range 4K TV, though, or an HD TV and lots of standard-definition sources, it should give you a performance lift for much less than buying a new display ■

HCC VERDICT



DVDO iScan Mini

→ £275 → www.karma-av.co.uk

WE SAY: If you feel that upscaled pictures on your 4K TV look in any way soft or fuzzy, the iScan Mini will almost certainly give you better results



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High-impact bass

REL's Serie S subwoofers have been given an overhaul to deliver what the bass specialist dubs 'Super High Output.' **Richard Stevenson** puts this to the test with the S/3 SHO

HERE AT HCC we rather liked REL's Serie S subwoofers, even if it has involved repeatedly telling sub-editors that there isn't an 's' on the end of Serie. When the company announced a Super High Output overhaul of the S/5 and S/3 models we had questions. Could they be better than the original? Would the price remain competitive? Might REL find that lost 's'? The answer to the last is 'no', but I'm happy to reply in the affirmative to the first two.

Auditioned here is the REL S/3 SHO. At £1,450 it is around £150 more than the original S/3 yet brings with it



AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Premium 10in
subwoofer with
wireless option

POSITION:
Middle of the new
SHO updates to
the Serie S range

PEERS:
B&W PVID;
Velodyne SPL-1200

HOME CINEMA
Choice
BEST BUY

a new Next Gen II 400W Class D amplifier, updated driver and revised electronics. The promised result is all the subwoofing goodness of the predecessor S/3 but with more bang for your buck.

Cosmetically things remain unchanged, save for an SHO legend appearing on the rear. It is the same exquisitely crafted, near cube-shaped cabinet with one of the best piano black finishes on any loudspeaker on the market, irrespective of price. The trim is no less lush, with chunky, REL-engraved brushed aluminium feet, chrome side handles to help move its near 28kg mass about and a bold, chunky ingot of a REL badge in the top. The latter two are also, I'm told, integral components in damping the substantial cabinet, which is over 40cm in all dimensions.

Behind the massive grille with its rear-edge bevel is REL's 10in, long-throw bass driver. This has a pressed aluminium cone and a rubber roll surround the size of a kids' bike tyre. The cone's smooth profile and matte aluminium finish are easy on the eye and, if you turn the S/3 turtle, it's 12in carbon weave passive radiator on the bottom is just as alluring. If you want to run this beast with the grille off, though, the main driver's gold colour chassis and roughly-cut bolt slots in the rubber surround are a bit of a mark down against an otherwise gorgeous piece of home cinema hardware.

Proving this model is as much go as it is, er, SHO, it's 400W amp is coupled with REL's custom filter network and the option of line-level stereo, line-level LFE/1 or high-level inputs; the latter via a special cable with a locking Neutrik connector, wired directly to your main amplifier in parallel with the front main loudspeakers. Controls encompass individual line/high-level volume, reversible phase and variable crossover. For an extra £230, you can make the S/3 SHO wireless with REL's LongBow wireless transmitter.

Carpet bomber

Setting up and positioning the S/3 SHO proved to be remarkable easy, although my rather uneven parquet floor meant some judicious use of a chunk of cardboard to keep things stable. REL does supply traditional carpet-piercing spikes that attach to the feet but recommends you use this woofer without unless you have a shag pile deep enough to lose a hamster in. The reason being that the downward-firing driver requires an air space precisely the height of the feet to perform at its best.

Within 10 seconds of letting rip with a choice cut from *John Wick*, the S/3 SHO was delivering big LF effects. So much so that as Wick's car drops into the concrete drain, the resulting explosion blew the grille clean off. Clearly, I hadn't pushed the lugs fully home when I replaced the grille but it does rather demonstrate what that Super High Output moniker is all about.

Yet sheer grunt and heft is not the S/3's trump card. What I really noticed, particularly in comparison with my usual 18in-driver Velodyne, was the tautness and impact of its output. Bass effects like gunshots are its forte. The REL's super-fast transient attack gives these a sense of reality rather than just bludgeoning you with a wall of LF noise.

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 10in front-firing continuous profile aluminium cone long-throw driver; 1 x 12in down-firing carbon-weave passive radiator

ENCLOSURE: Sealed, with passive radiator

FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED): 22Hz (-6dB)

ON BOARD POWER: 400W Class D amplifier

REMOTE CONTROL: No

DIMENSIONS: 406(w) x 424(h) x 464(d)mm

WEIGHT: 27.86kg

CONNECTIONS: LFE phono input; stereo phono line-level input; Neutrik Speakon

high-level input; SMA antenna connector for use with REL LongBow wireless unit

PARTNER WITH



REL LONGBOW: Remove a long cable run from your system with this wireless signal transmission kit that's compatible with the S/3 SHO. Available for £230, the LongBow pairs your AV receiver to the woofer in a matter of seconds



It's a thoroughly addictive experience and certainly goes a long way to deliver on REL's promise to combine the slam of a 10in sealed box subwoofer with the scale of a 15in driver. I'm not convinced it plumbs the depths to the same extent as a larger model (REL rates it down to 22Hz at -6dB), but it certainly impresses in terms of impact and lack of overhang.

For typical mid-sized UK cinema/living rooms, REL may have hit on pretty much the perfect-sized sub. Compared directly with my 18-incher, I began to appreciate the S/3 SHO's lightning-fast and evenly-balanced approach to LFE.

The fire-fight shots around the night-club swimming pool in *John Wick* proved this point, and the S/3 SHO

was equally good romping through some older favourites, like the new Atmos-remastered *The Fifth Element* and space drama *Gravity*. While the latter film lacks a constant soundtrack of bass, the sound designers use LFE to subtly underpin effects and atmosphere. The REL's superior tautness and articulation is in evidence here, adding that extra dimension to the aural mix without sounding disconnected. And if you regularly listen to music on your system with a subwoofer in play, those attributes translate into beautifully poised and eloquent bass augmentation.

Compelling proposition

The S/3 SHO's asking price is not insubstantial, particularly if you do opt for REL's LongBow transmitter. Woofer buyers will no doubt also consider more affordable options. However, this new addition deserves audition – it is a thoroughly compelling proposition in every respect. The S/3 SHO looks superb, is easy to setup and delivers the low-frequency goods with movies and music alike ■

HCC VERDICT



REL S/3 SHO

→ £1,450 → www.rel.net

WE SAY: REL's SHO upgrade builds on the original S/3 with taut, fast bass and a scale to match larger subwoofers. And the gorgeous styling helps justify the price tag

Upfiring delights

Canadian audio noodler PSB delivers its first Atmos-enabled speakers at a tempting price. **Steve May** gets high



HOME CINEMA Choice
RECOMMENDED



PSB'S IMAGINE XA is the latest addition to the slowly growing ranks of dedicated Dolby Atmos-enabled upfiring loudspeakers. They're a mid-priced offering (£350 per pair), smart enough to pass muster in well-appointed company, thanks to a black ash cabinet and matching fabric grille.

The speakers are intended to sit atop and cosmetically match PSB's X2T, X1T and XB floorstanders and monitors – the drivers should also be a timbre match – although they can be used as standalone additions to an existing home theatre system. Anti-slip strips are provided in the box for those chancing them with third-party towers or on dedicated speaker stands.

Setup is straightforward: if you're not mounting them atop sibling PSBs, aim to place them around a metre off the floor (and no lower than 91cm, insists PSB), and ideally around 2m from your listening position. Alternatively, the modules have an integrated wall-mounting bracket, which means they can be installed, angling downwards, in a front/rear/side-height position.

Unlike the budget Atmos speaker *du jour*

- Onkyo's SKH-410
- the PSBs are two-way cabinets. The Imagine XA tweeter, with cute PSB logo, is a ferrofluid-cooled 1in titanium dome with neodymium magnet, while the mustard-coloured 4in woofer employs a clay-filled polypropylene cone.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Dolby Atmos-enabled speakers

POSITION:
PSB's first Atmos offering, part of its Imagine series

PEERS:
KEF R50;
Definitive Technology A60

The pair look sweet and it's tempting to use them without their grille, but they are designed to go undercover. There's clearly something happening regards directionality with the grille, as the two drive units are isolated by foam inserts that function as a wave guide. A pair of chunky speaker terminals, labelled 'Height' to avoid any novice confusion, complete the look.

Typically these Imagine XAs would be used as a pair, or quartet, dictated by the channel support of your chosen Atmos AV receiver. The idea is to bounce the height elements in the Atmos mix off your ceiling, with a little bit of crafty notch-filtering added, back to your ears. They effectively become virtual ceiling speakers.

Listen up

The Imagine XA's closest competition probably comes from KEF's R50s [reviewed in *HCC* #252], but as a pair the PSBs are some £250 cheaper, which will make them hard to ignore for most shoppers. And despite this relative affordability, there's nothing cut-price about performance. While the rival KEFs have arguably more weight and a superior cosmetic finish, these XA's are still a full-bodied listen. I suspect you'll be hard pressed to spot any obvious differences between the two amid the chaos of a *Transformers: Age or Extinction* melee.

In purely sonic terms, the modules sound smooth and accurate. The quality of the drivers would not seem inappropriate in an upmarket bookshelf design. This isn't much of a surprise as they are the same used in the rest of the Imagine range.

And in theatrical use the Imagine XAs are highly effective, effortlessly directing and

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 1x 1in Titanium dome tweeter; 1x 4in clay-infused polypropylene cone midbass driver

ENCLOSURE: Sealed Dolby Atmos-enabled design

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 100Hz-23kHz

SENSITIVITY: 87dB

POWER HANDLING: 80W

DIMENSIONS: 165(w) x 267(h) x 171(d)mm

WEIGHT: 7.26kg (pair)

The XAs' wave-guide grilles work to ensure the speakers hit the target Dolby Atmos spec

panning objects above the main surround plane. Dolby's Atmos *Amaze* trailer sounds fresh and immersive; the PSBs placing specific rainforest FX convincingly up high. 360-degree wraparound pans are steered without breakage.

The Dolby Atmos mix of Enrique Iglesias' Latin-infused pop hit *Bailando* features plenty of snappy height-mixed handclaps that help carry the dance rhythm like a wave; these speakers have no problem keeping up with the beat – they're fast and musical. There's nothing particularly jarring about their presentation either; you should be able to system-match these modules with pretty much any premium cabinetry (although listening to them did make me hanker after a pair of PSB X2T floorstanders to partner them with).

A frequency sweep reveals some very faint signs of life from as low as 31.5Hz, but the speakers truly become effective at around 100Hz. This extended range creates plenty of opportunities in terms of crossover choice and system tuning.

At higher registers, the Imagine XAs sound a tad compressed – I couldn't help imagining them tethered to a leash – but this actually seems to work well with Atmos elements, as it seems to make height objects a little easier to follow.

Difficult to resist

These are a solid combination of value and performance. If you're upgrading to a Dolby Atmos array, the Imagine XAs occupy a difficult to resist centre-ground, and when it comes to sheer sonic involvement they're a blast. They're not as visually sexy as the rival KEFs, and they stand 26cm high, which may come as a surprise, but they belong on your audition list ■

HCC VERDICT



PSB Imagine XA

→ £350 → www.psbspeakers.com

WE SAY: Handsomely finished Atmos upfiringers combine a well-rounded performance with easy-to-match sonic character.

HOME CINEMA



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Touch and go

Mark Craven embraces his oft-ignored trendy side with a gesture-sensitive universal remote control that aims to marry style with simplicity



The colour-changing S logo denotes what profile is being used

UNIVERSAL REMOTE CONTROLS have obvious appeal. Regular zappers have witnessed serious mission creep over the decades, so that many now sport more buttons than a Cinderella convention. Factor in the three, four or more handsets of a typical household and we're drowning in control complexity.

The SPIN remote is billed by its creators as 'the simplest, most stylish remote ever.' I'm not really that fussed about style when it comes to my doofers, but if it can nail the former then I'll be happy.

The wisdom of crowds

The result of some innovative Dutch product designers and a successful crowdfunding campaign, the SPIN remote began shipping to initial backers in July in preparation for its wider launch. Purchase is direct from the company's

website, priced at €99. At the time of writing, it was still saying 'pre-order' rather than 'buy.'

The remote is a handheld, spherical aluminium shell with funky glowing top surface and illuminated ring around its flat base. On its underside is a

touchpad controller. This pops easily off to reveal space for two AA batteries.

It feels good in the palm of your hand, which is key as using the SPIN remote is a tactile experience. In addition to the touchpad, it features internal sensors to judge its own physical orientation, because gestures (a twist in the air, a rotation on a tabletop...) can be commands too.

To use the remote you'll need a device (Apple or Android) running the SPIN remote free app. Your device must support Bluetooth 4.0, as this is how app and remote chat with each other. Also, you need the phone/tablet running Bluetooth close by for the remote to work, which isn't ideal.

The setup process can take a while, as the app – while responsive and nicely designed – isn't the most intuitive around. For instance, when you're first asked to name your profile, it isn't clear what this is for. I called my first profile 'Mark', because I'm stupid, before realising it would be more sensible to name it 'TV' as I was then taken into assigning control commands for that profile. Subsequently, the next profile I established I named 'BD player'.

Assigning controls is a matter of selecting what you want to do from a list on the app, and pressing the corresponding button on your hardware's IR zapper. Because of the SPIN remote's combination of touchpad and motion sensitive controls, there are plenty of options,

SPECIFICATIONS

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Device running Android 4.3 or above with Bluetooth 4.0; Apple iPhone (4s and above), iPad (Air, Mini, 3rd/4th gen), iPod Touch (5th gen or later) with Bluetooth 4.0

DIMENSIONS: 67(w) x 47(h) x 67(d)mm
WEIGHT: 150g

FEATURES: Sonos and Philips Hue control integration; app-based setup; motion, rotation, orientation and touch control; capacitive touchpad; 6 IR LEDs for 360-degree control; FindMe alarm; requires 2 x AA batteries; customisable profiles



although the app guides you towards certain outcomes. After a while, I had the touchpad mirroring the direction keys on my TV's remote, volume controlled by a twist of my hand and channel up/down by another twist on a different orientation. Vibration feedback lets you know you're making progress.

To switch between hardware you just double-tap the 'S' logo on the remote's top. The light then changes colour. For instance, you can have blue to denote your TV, red for your Sky box, yellow for your hi-fi, etc. Macro commands are promised, but not currently an option.

This remote is undoubtedly super-cool. It will make all your other handsets slink off in embarrassment. And, yes, once programmed it's simple to use... to an extent. Firstly, you'll need to remember what gestures and controls are set to what, as unlike other universal handsets there are no button legends to give you a clue. Secondly, I doubt you'll persuade anyone less tech-intrigued than yourself to use it. It's only really intuitive if you've set it up yourself – place it in the hand of a visitor to your movie den and they'll be clueless.

It's therefore possibly too ambitious for its own good. A lot of fun, though ■

HCC VERDICT



SPIN remote

→ €99 → www.spinremote.com

WE SAY: Undoubtedly clever and fun to play with, but the SPIN remote currently doesn't manage to be as simple to use as it wants.



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No low blows from upmarket 2.1 system

Sony's latest Hi-Res Audio-certified soundbar is more panna cotta than popcorn, reckons **Steve May**, but that's not to say it doesn't have its charms

WHILE IT'S TRUE you really don't need to spend a great deal of money to get a soundbar that sounds noticeably better than the average flatscreen TV, you have to look higher up the fidelity food chain to find one that can make a decent fist of all the roles a modern soundbar has to play.

Adding volumetric weight to movies and broadcast content is one thing, but in our connected era there's also multiroom audio to consider, not to mention all those different streaming disciplines (Apple AirPlay, Bluetooth, Spotify Connect) as well as hi-res audio compatibility.

Having the chops to do all that is a tall order. To balance them all equally is quite another. Enter the Sony HT-NT5...

Reaching high

At £600, this new addition to Sony's soundbar stable is priced towards the upper end of the market, but you can spend plenty more for some top-flight offerings from the likes of Arcam, Focal *et al.* And the HT-NT5 does tick a lot of boxes, including DSD file compatibility and wireless streaming.

Cosmetically, it's a bit gorgeous, with its black cabinetry looking sharp and purposeful. A 2.1 package, it's bundled with a wireless subwoofer and removable grille. To be honest, I much prefer the 'bar with the grille removed. Do this and you can appreciate the three-way speaker design. Stereo presentation comes via a pair of midrange drivers, with high-frequencies handled by gold-ringed super tweeters and secondary tweeters on the edge of the unit. Every driver is served by a Sony S Master digital amp module, which explains the somewhat confusing 6.1 nomenclature in Sony's literature.

The partnering subwoofer is a pleasingly manageable MDF box, with a front-firing high-gloss port. The driver size is unspecified, but I'd imagine it's the same 6.5in design used elsewhere in Sony's home cinema product range.

Once you've extracted the system from its large L-shaped container, it doesn't take too long to get up and running, especially as the subwoofer quickly pairs wirelessly with the main bar. A traditional small remote control is supplied; there are also touch-sensitive controls and a glowing text display hidden in the chassis.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Upper mid-range
soundbar/sub system

POSITION:
Premium soundbar
above Sony's HT-CT
models

PEERS:
DALI Kubik One;
Yamaha YSP-2500;
Arcam Solo Bar

It's well-specified when it comes to connectivity. A main recess on the rear offers two HDMI inputs and an ARC-enabled HDMI output. A further jack-pack features an additional HDMI input, optical digital audio input and Ethernet port. All three HDMI support 4K/Ultra HD content with HDCP 2.2 copy protection.

For multimedia moguls, there's a side-mounted USB port, in addition to dual-band Wi-Fi connectivity and Bluetooth with NFC and support for Sony's proprietary high-resolution LDAC codec.

'This 2.1 package is elegantly designed, surprisingly refined and bristling with up-to-the-minute connectivity'

The HDMI-fed user interface is nuts and bolts, and essentially the same as that found on Sony's HT-RT5 [HCC # 257]. It comprises a tiled menu of all connected sources and inputs, so you can hop quickly between, say, your BD deck, NAS drive and TV's audio output.

The HT-NT5 is designed to sit flat in front of your flatscreen TV, or wall mounted. Unsurprisingly, it performs differently depending on the orientation you choose. Stereo imaging is at its most pronounced when the 'bar' is on-wall. Yet overall, key characteristics don't change. It seems the HT-NT5 is smart enough to optimise performance depending on how you position it.

Tuned for tunes?

When it comes to performance, that Hi-Res Audio badge on the bodywork is a bit of giveaway. I quickly got the impression that the HT-NT5 has been tuned primarily for its musical performance. It works well with vocals and instrumentation, finding details in your music library.

This clarity serves movies and TV well, too, however. If you often find it difficult to follow complex soundtracks at home you'll appreciate the Sony's enunciation. Yet there are caveats. At times, film soundtracks can sound too sharp. There's an edge here which grates when the wick is turned up.

The subwoofer seems to expend all its energy above 50Hz, not really making any meaningful noise below. This can rob films of visceral impact. Low LFE blows that can make you grin in amazement are largely lost here. In boxing drama *Southpaw*, when Jake Gyllenhaal is smashed in the face in the opening fight sequence, there's no deep weight to the punch.

Integration between the subwoofer and the mids isn't peerless either. There can often seem disproportionate booming. Things which shouldn't cause the sub to draw attention to itself do,



SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x midrange drivers; 2 x super tweeters; 2 x tweeters **AMPLIFICATION (CLAIMED):** 400W **CONNECTIONS:** 3 x HDMI inputs; 1 x HDMI output; 1 x optical digital audio input; 1 x USB; 1 x Ethernet; 3.5mm audio input **DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD MA:** Yes **SEPARATE SUBWOOFER:** Yes. Wireless **REMOTE CONTROL:** Yes **DIMENSIONS:** 1,008(w) x 58(h) x 127(d)mm (soundbar); 190(w) x 382(h) x 386(d)mm (subwoofer) **WEIGHT:** 3.2kg (soundbar); 8.1kg (subwoofer)

FEATURES: Hi-res audio support including DSD; DSEE HX compressed audio compensation; DLNA playback; USB playback; Clear Audio+, Movie, Music, Game, Sport sound modes; wall-mountable; Google Cast; Bluetooth (including LDAC); multiroom support with Sony SongPal app; 4K/HDCP 2.2 passthrough

PARTNER WITH



QOBUZ: The French-based music portal offers both streaming and download options, with CD-quality for the former if you sign up to the £20-per-month 'hi-fi' subscription. 24-bit FLAC files can be purchased for one-off fees.

because higher bass is directional and it's being asked to reach up to around 100Hz. Watching UFC – I'm turning into a pugilist – I was aware of a reoccurring low tone that didn't appear to correlate to any of the scuffling going on in the Octagon. The subwoofer was overreacting to whooshing graphic effects in the broadcast. You can, of course, turn down the sub's level, but that ultimately becomes an exercise in self-muting.

This isn't a volume monster of a system, but for most sources I didn't feel I was being shortchanged of welly. Movies on Blu-ray and audio streams offered enough in terms of room-filling noise. However Sky, for reasons I've never fully understood, broadcasts some shows at seriously depleted volume, *Game of Thrones* being a prime example. Even at maximum volume, I could only get those dragons sounding moderately raucous.

When it comes to integrated service support, Google Cast is key as it effectively widens the number of sources that can be streamed to the 'bar', including Qobuz, Google Play Music and TuneIn radio. In this regard, it's a cut above much of the competition, and its inclusion into Sony's multiroom music family will find it fans, too.

Ultimately the HT-NT5 wins more battles than it loses. It's elegantly designed and surprisingly refined, and bristles with up-to-the-minute connectivity. If you're looking for a real room-shaker then it's probably not for you, but if you live in a flat rather than a country manor and have neighbours you actually like, this musical 2.1 package won't offend ■

HCC VERDICT



Sony HT-NT5

→ £600 → www.sony.co.uk

WE SAY: This elegant 2.1 sound system is surprisingly musical with hi-res audio sources, but it won't convince if action movies are your bag



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Bose QC35

The cable gets cut from Bose's popular QC range. Can these cans get **Ed Selley**'s approval?

THE QC35 IS the latest iteration of Bose's tremendously successful noise-cancelling 'Quiet Comfort' headphone series, and the basic ingredients haven't been messed about with. The QC35s are a hybrid-sized, folding design that can operate as a conventional passive headphone or in noise-cancelling mode once the active section has been powered up. Where it differs from its predecessors is that, for the first time, it combines this functionality with wireless connectivity via Bluetooth. In 2016, cables = bad.

In keeping with previous Bose Bluetooth 'phones, the QC35s have no aptX functionality, but does offer NFC touch to pair technology.



Bose also sells a black option of the QC35s

Visually, these are nothing to get excited about but are sturdy, easy to use and – as the name suggests – very comfortable. Weight is well distributed and the pads provide enough traction to stay snuggled to your ears. A carry case completes the luxury traveller vibe.

Used as passive headphones, the QC35s put in a solid if not spectacular performance. Watching *Stranger Things* via Netflix sees the cans extract a healthy layer of fine detail, and the creepy noises needed for truly atmospheric thrills are effectively captured.

With noise-cancelling engaged, the most important thing is that the QC35s still sound natural and tonally even. Noise cancelling works its magic best on low, consistent tones but also does a good job of cutting out large swathes of the outside world.

Despite the lack of aptX, using Bluetooth for transmission doesn't prove a stumbling block, and the overall agreeable performance is helped by the very low noise floor that Bose has successfully worked into the product. The connection is stable and works at an impressive distance from the sending unit.

The QC35s are pricey for Bluetooth headphones, but Bose's portable audio know-how shows through. One to consider if you want to wrap yourself up in tunes and TV ■

HCC VERDICT



Bose QC35

→ £290 → www.bose.co.uk

WWW.SONDAUDIO.COM/£30

Sond Audio Portable BT Speaker

Danny Phillips likes the styling of this budget Bluetooth speaker, but...

SOND AUDIO IS not a name uttered with hushed reverence in hi-fi circles, but if you're looking for a cheap 'n' cheerful Bluetooth speaker solution (maybe for an office or garden getaway) then it'll probably pop up on your radar.

This Ronseal-titled Portable Bluetooth NFC Speaker (a name so long we had to shorten it,



Battery life is rated at a healthy 18 hours

above) is a 16W stereo affair with front drivers angled at 30 degrees to project sound upwards.

It's a light, compact unit, ideal for taking out and about. The solid bodywork is covered in a rubbery finish that provides good grip, while a foam pad on the bottom absorbs vibrations.

The red and black colour scheme is nice but the thin speaker mesh and touch key display are aren't. The way it beeps when it hits maximum volume is also irritating.

Features are good for the money, though. There's Bluetooth 4.0 with aptX and NFC for swift device pairing, a 3D mode that purports to deliver 'simulated surround sound', and a 3.5mm input for your non-Bluetooth devices.

But the best part is the quoted 18-hour battery life, which is ridiculously long. You won't need to

schedule regular recharge sessions (it powers from microUSB).

Sadly, this budget speaker lets the side down where it counts – performance. Its sound is thin and compressed, with an underwhelming bass output. There's little depth or heft to beats and basslines, while voices lack body and presence.

Adding to the problem is the hard treble, which gets fatiguing very quickly. It doesn't go particularly loud either – you might struggle to hear it over the chatter of a back-garden barbecue.

This is an admirable attempt to deliver a cheap Bluetooth speaker with some nifty features, but ultimately its lacklustre sound makes it one to avoid ■

HCC VERDICT



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Being part of the annual EISA Awards means **Mark Craven** has learned to say 'contrast ratio' in nine different languages, and discovered Dolby Atmos speakers he didn't know existed

THIS ISSUE, ON page 111, we feature this year's EISA Awards, the results of a collaborative selection and judging process between home technology magazines and websites across Europe. HCC sits on two panels – home theatre audio and home theatre video; other categories covered are hi-fi (of which our sister magazine, *Hi-Fi News*, is a member) and mobile devices, photography and in-car audio.

Getting together with colleagues from Italy, Sweden, Belgium, Hungary, Greece, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal and more is always an interesting experience. There's no real language barrier (most of them speak better English than I do..), and it's obvious that, no matter where you come from, the home cinema concerns of stable black levels and thunderous LFE are universal. A Spanish AV-Holic is just the same as you, basically. Except they probably have an air-conditioner in their movie room.

What isn't universal is the availability of products across the continent. While there's a recognisable pan-European market when it comes to major brands and massive categories such as TV, head off into the world of loudspeakers, for instance, and things can get a little more complicated.

During a conversation with a German editor about home cinema we got onto the topic of Dolby Atmos-enabled speakers. The usual suspects – KEF, Onkyo – were mentioned, and then came Nubert. I'll confess that this is a brand I had very little knowledge of. The name rang a faint, distant bell, but nothing else. It transpires that Nubert, a smallscale German loudspeaker manufacturer founded in the 1970s, has begun selling two-way Atmos upfitters as part of its nuLine series of home cinema enclosures. They look rather natty, and sell for €300 a piece.

The problem, from my point of view anyway, is that they're not available in the UK. And the situation will stay that way unless an AV dealer wants to take a punt and start importing.

Canton, another German marque, also sells a range of home cinema gear that you won't find in Blighty. And the same happens in reverse, too. I spent five minutes regaling my Euro-pals with the budget brilliance of Now TV before remembering that the platform simply isn't available on the continent.

Thankfully, despite these discrepancies, the EISA Award winners will be familiar to you. Speaker packages from DALI and Monitor Audio, Panasonic's UHD Blu-ray deck, Samsung's KS9000 series TV, Denon's AVR-X2300W – all have been featured in HCC in recent months and are worthy winners.

Next stop, Berlin!

My AV calendar runs like clockwork, with the EISA Awards quickly followed by the annual IFA technology show in Berlin. As usual, I'm excited to see what the electronics industry has cooked up for demos and launches. Certainly, there will be enticing TV reveals, and JVC will debut its first native Ultra HD projector. Yet **I'm particularly eager to see if there are any developments when it comes to Ultra HD Blu-ray**. The format's first era has seen us faced with two choices

– Panasonic and Samsung's players – now joined by the Xbox One S console, no doubt a bargain option if you can be sure other household members won't be hogging it to play games. Yet other brands, particularly LG, have been coy. Might IFA see it unveil a UHD disc spinner, complete with Dolby Vision support? Come back next issue to find out! ■

Are you waiting for more options before buying a 4K Blu-ray deck? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

Mark Craven
is attempting to
memorise an A-Z
list of every single
loudspeaker brand.
After three days
he's got as far
as B&W





Film Fanatic

Have you started to take your home cinema for granted? If so, then maybe you should try experiencing it through a child's eyes, says Uncle **Anton van Beek**

IT IS ALL too easy to become blasé about our chosen hobby. Sitting in the *Home Cinema Choice* office, and witnessing a parade of Ultra HD TVs, projectors, 7.2 loudspeaker arrays and feature-laden AVRs passing through the doors, means I sometimes get the feeling that this is all a perfectly normal part of modern life.

The truth, of course, is just the opposite. When it comes to friends who don't have any links to the AV industry, only a handful have a TV with a screen larger than 40in and there are none at all who have gone down the projector route. One friend I've known since university still doesn't even own a telly. Instead, he and his wife are content to cosy next to each other in bed, binge-watching *Breaking Bad* via a laptop and a Netflix subscription. Home cinema, that ain't.

The situation doesn't improve with my own movie-loving parents. Neither my constant harping on about the joys of bigscreen entertainment, nor the copies of *HCC* I surreptitiously insert into their magazine rack, have persuaded them to go any larger than 40in. They're quite happy to watch any Blu-rays I take around on their dinky little telly (which to me feels not so much small as much as it does very, very far away). Thankfully, the soundbase/subwoofer combo I bought them a couple of years ago at least ensures that every blockbuster sounds suitably largescale, even if they never actually look that way.

First impressions count

Sometimes, though, it takes seeing your home cinema setup through somebody else's eyes to remind you of how special it is. Which brings me to earlier this month, when my niece and nephew (aged eight and six, respectively) came to stay for a week. Each evening, after they tired me out on various daytrips, my time was spent trying (in vain)

to convince them that my *LEGO Spider-Man: Web Warriors Ultimate Bridge Battle* was a decorative collectible and not a toy to be played with, and (far more successfully, but possibly less responsibly) attempting to teach both how to play Blackjack.

Then came the moment when I spun some 3D Blu-ray film clips. This really got their attention.

A couple of sequences from *The Good Dinosaur* did a fine job of introducing the two kids to the concept of 3D cinema, then it was onto footage from *Avengers Assemble*. This definitely dazzled – at least, **that's the impression I took from the open-mouthed look of wonder that remained fixed on their faces** as they watched a big slice of the film's final showdown.

At their urging, even more 3D clips followed over successive evenings (but not *Avengers: Age of Ultron* – even little 'uns deserve better than that disc's awful audio...). The results were the same every single time, and the wide-eyed sense of awe that was so evident was a reminder of the effect that a home cinema system brings to the act of watching a movie.

It's all about the excitement that comes not just from watching a film, but from truly experiencing it; from being drawn into its visuals and enveloped by its powerful sound design. Personally, I believe this is an experience that only a home cinema setup can deliver (outside of an actual cinema, obviously) and it's one that it's worth being reminded of every now and again. It's the reason, after all, that you've invested all that time and money. So if you ever find yourself becoming blasé about your setup, invite some friends or family over and experience it through their eyes ■

Do you have any favourite demo sequences to show friends? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com



Mini AV-Holics Isla and Leo get ready for some more 3D home cinema fun...



Anton van Beek
discovered that it's quite tricky to put together a list of child-friendly film clips when most of your Blu-rays are '80s slasher flicks



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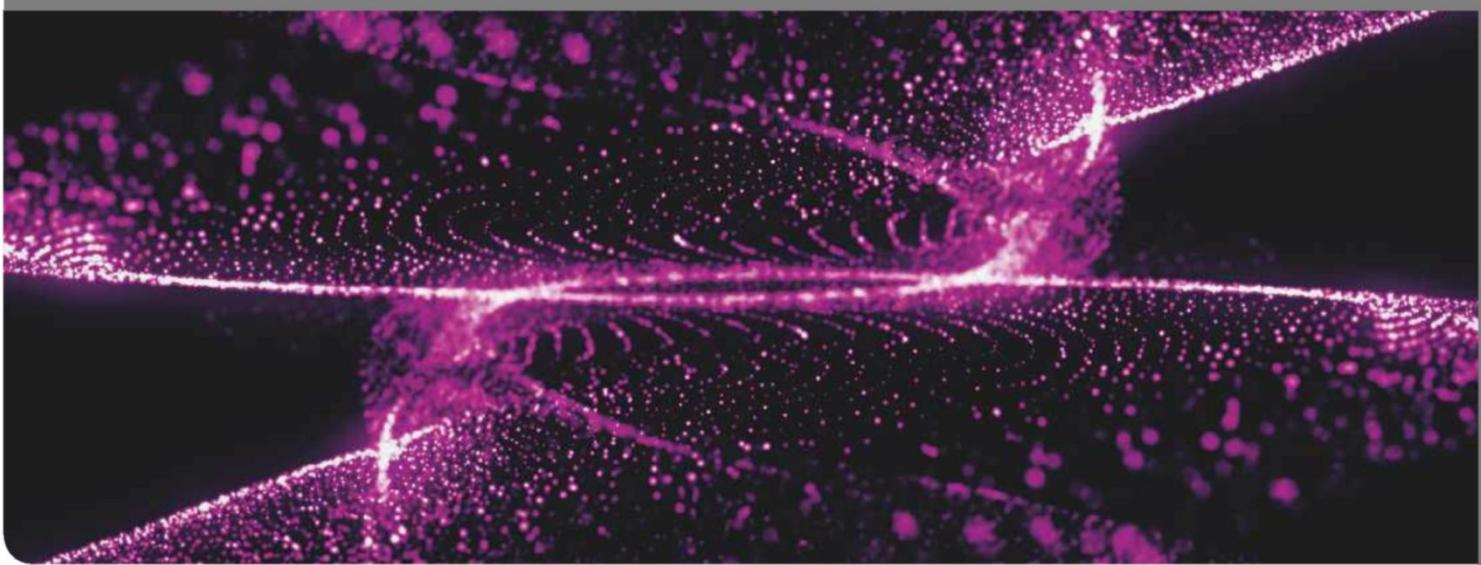
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In The Mix

Jon Thompson has seen the future of TV. Possibly. At the very least, he believes Quantum Dot QLED displays could kickstart a welcome high-end flatscreen price war

THE KING IS dead, long live the King! Display technology moves at such a fast rate it only seems yesterday that OLED was heralded as the revolution that would bring us all to Shangri-La in terms of viewing experience. The truth is, OLED has flaws, just as its predecessors did. As will any future technology.

For a start, OLED is energy hungry, and – if owners aren't careful – can suffer with issues, just like plasma, concerning image retention. Nor can it achieve the brightness levels *really* needed for high dynamic range – in fact, the latest generation of panels, when challenged with producing a full-screen white, don't achieve more than 150 nits. Doesn't bode well for an HDR-flavoured snow-bound thriller...

And perhaps the biggest issue is that only one manufacturer – LG Display – is making panels for televisions, so you have little price competition. The tickets are high for something that could only have a few years' real life-span, considering future developments in HDMI specs, resolution etc.

Coming along to replace OLED is (drum roll, please...) QLED. Yes, you read that right. OLED is being challenged by QLED. It's two letters further along in the alphabet so must be better...

QLED is a development of quantum dot (QD) technology, which appeared in 2013 – the very year OLED took the baton from plasma – out of a company formed by former MIT graduates. The first implementations of QD in LCD-based TVs replaced the traditional light filters. Depending on how small the nanotechnology quantum dot is made, it will glow red, green or blue when subjected to UV light. This technology is not a filter but an emitter, and a very efficient one too. It has meant massive improvements in LCD televisions.

The next step on the path to be the TV king is embedding quantum dots into an LED itself, creating

a very, very wide colour gamut and enabling a TV to get closer than ever to REC.2020 colour. The tech calls itself QLED or QDLED (Quantum Dot Light Emitting Diodes).

I recently spent time with a prototype QLED screen and was impressed with how truly natural the picture looked, particularly when next to an OLED display. (The OLED was running a full 3D Colour LUT to correct the errors in the display, as was the QLED. Sorry. Nothing is perfect!).

Price war

Yet the real advantage of QLED TVs could be easier, more cost-efficient manufacturing in comparison to OLED and the potential for lower prices. Here's hoping we get TV sets in the £1,000-£2,000 range with quality and features that are now only seen in sets at around £4,000-£5,000.

Sony previously demo'd a technology at CES called Crystal LED that works in much the same way, but it appears the first manufacturer out of the gate with a QLED set is going to be Samsung. I can see this getting messy and down right dirty, with each side making claims of superiority – unlike OLED, Samsung probably won't be the only brand making QLED sets. I therefore expect LG to pull some tricks and see pricing drops in 2017.

Unlike other technologies, such as Canon's SED that never came to much due to manufacturing issues and cost, I think QLED is a player. OLED is a one-horse race with only LG seriously investing in its future. Do other brands want one rival holding the future to the display market? A lot of people have a lot to gain creating not only a viable, cost effective alternative but a seriously superior scalable tech ■

*Have you invested in an OLED TV? Let us know:
email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

When he's not in his screening room, **Jon Thompson** tweets about Hollywood gossip, movie-making and digital mastering at @johnnyfocal



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How to... Set up your subwoofer

It's everyone's favourite part of their home cinema speaker system, but getting the very best out of a subwoofer can take time and experimentation. **Team HCC** outlines the installation, placement and user adjustments that are required to get your bass bin firing on all cylinders.

THE EASIEST BIT when it comes to subwoofer installation is hooking it up to your AV receiver. Probably nothing is simpler when it comes to home cinema. Using a phono cable (not typically supplied with subwoofers, annoyingly), connect your woofer's LFE input (sometimes

marked as .1 on the sub's control panel) to the subwoofer output on your AV receiver. And that is all you need to do.

If a sub has dual (stereo) phono inputs (for use in hi-fi setups), one will often be also marked as .1. If not, just use one and ignore the other (your sub's manual may specify which). More advanced subwoofers may also feature balanced XLR inputs or additional high-level inputs. Using these is optional – again, refer to your woofer's manual.

Next, you need to set crossover – the frequency point where your subwoofer will take over bass duties from your speakers. While your sub will offer its own independent crossover dial, you'll be using your AVR's bass management, having set your speakers to 'small' in its menus (and, yes, you should set your speakers to small even if you have floorstanders all around the room – unless those floorstanders have 12in bass drivers and you don't want to make use of your subwoofer in the first place...). So regards the sub's crossover control, either set this to the highest it will go (typically between 150Hz and 200Hz) or – if there's an option – to LFE bypass. This way your AVR is in charge.

As for the actual crossover set by your AVR, a good starting place (and the THX standard) is 80Hz, although if you're using bookshelf/satellite speakers throughout your system, raising this may help round out bass performance.

Waving goodbye to standing waves?

Low-frequency sound, of the type generated by your home cinema's bass bin, is notoriously difficult to tame. Thanks to reflections, LF effects, while non-directional in terms of perception, can build up in some areas of your listening room and cancel out at others, resulting in boom and suck-out nodes



respectively. And these are issues that a few carefully placed wall-hung rugs can't fix.

This, of course, isn't what you want – you crave an even bass response at as many listening positions as possible, certainly the one that you sit in. Therefore where you place your subwoofer is key. Yes, your AV receiver will almost certainly offer a room EQ feature that will work to lessen the effect of boom nodes and, possibly, try to counter suck-outs with frequency boosts, but this can only work so far. Give it a helping hand by getting your woofer in the best place.

Let's say you have one sub. Where should you put it? Unfortunately there is no clear-cut, decisive answer, but a few points of best practice to follow. Begin, if possible, with the subwoofer placed towards the corner position of your front wall. This should reduce dips in bass output (nulls) throughout your room because corner placement works to 'excite' room modes, resulting in a louder output. Furthermore, having your sub at the business end of your cinema, close to the left, right and centre enclosures, will aid in terms of integration with those key speakers.

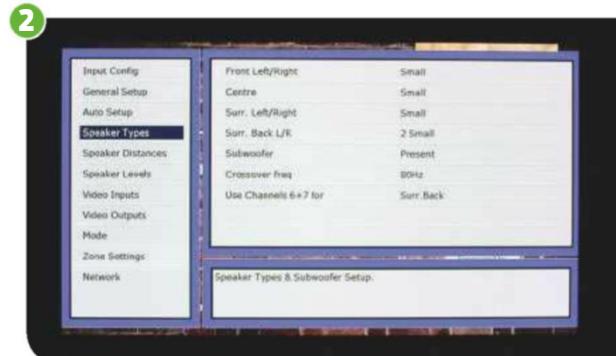
Once in situ, it's time to demo from your usual listening position. But first you need to choose phase and gain. The former is usually a choice of '0' or '180' on a phase switch on your sub's control panel. Getting this right will mean your subwoofer and your surround speakers are operating in phase (as long as you've wired the latter correctly...). If your sub is out of phase, then you'll get bass frequencies cancelling each other out. To set this, you just need to trust your ears. As subwoofer guru REL states with welcome simplicity: 'the correct phase is whichever position [setting] is the loudest or fullest.'

As for gain, even the most bass-obsessed AV-Holics should avoid setting this to its highest level, as your sub will dominate the soundfield completely. A decent setup path is to begin with it turned right down, and then increase level until you feel you have a good balance between the woofer and your array. Note that your AVR's EQ procedure will make its own adjustment. It's not unusual to find the level lowered post-EQ, as many users tend to set gain relatively high. There's nothing to stop you boosting it again afterwards if you feel your AVR is being a spoilsport.

Let's get rolling

With phase and gain set, move onto analysing your sub's performance. A flat, even frequency response is what you're after. Music material with a rolling undulating bassline is a good place to start (many swear by Michael Jackson's *Billie Jean*), or – even better – a series of low-frequency test tones (such as Real Traps' Test Tone CD, now available as a free download from realtraps.com). With the latter, start at around 150Hz and, leaving volume unchanged, move through the test tones down to around 40Hz. Chances are some tones will sound louder than others, due to the effect your room is having on bass waves. Some may sound noticeably quieter. Of course, if you're generally happy with the results, and the woofer is in the optimum position for you in terms of room layout, you may want to stop here when it comes to placement, and run your AVR's EQ to see what improvements it can yield. Alternatively, especially if you're suffering from an annoying bass null right where you usually kick back with a movie, it's time to experiment with some good, old-fashioned trial and error.

Error? Certainly, as there are no hard and fast rules. You want to move your subwoofer (or possibly your front



speakers, or even your seating...), and see if this has a positive impact on your subwoofer's performance. The most in-depth option is to conduct a 'subwoofer crawl', a technique recommended by subwoofer brand SVS. This is based on the acoustic science that, essentially, means there's no difference in your subwoofer's performance from your listening position than if you were to swap them around. So, rather than moving your sub, you can put said woofer on top of your sofa and crawl around different spots in your room hunting for the sweetest bass notes. You then mark that spot and place the woofer there. A drawback to this technique is that you look a bit stupid while you do it, and you may discover the 'perfect place' is somewhere impractical (in front of your viewing room door, say..).

The more usual procedure is to gradually shift the placement of your sub, relistening to the same demo sequence or test tones every time. And it's here where you may be surprised how even moving it a few inches left or right, or bringing it forward, can effect its performance, as the relationship alters between its low-frequency output and the dimensions of your room, its furniture, and that life-size Han Solo replica. Hopefully, you'll find a spot where bass is natural-sounding (and not overly boomy), taut and able to exhibit subtle changes. And, again, run your AVR's EQ process.

A final word of advice: don't get frustrated if you still experience the occasional frequency boost or dip. A perfect bass response is intensely tricky to achieve (read 'impossible'); what's more important is paying attention to subwoofer setup to ensure it sounds good, rather than messy. Get that done, and then you can start thinking about bass traps... ■



TOP TIP

PARTNERS IN CRIME:

When conducting subwoofer placement experiments, bribe a friend to help – either sat at the listening position or (preferably) moving the woofer around...

1. A subwoofer is a key part of home cinema sound, so make an effort to set it up correctly

2. Use your AVR's menus to set your sub's crossover level

3. Subwoofer controls (shown here on an SVS SB-2000) will usually include gain, crossover and phase

DO IT!

COST:

Nothing – assuming you've already bought your sub!

TIME:

Give yourself at least an hour to experiment with different subwoofer positions, run your AVR's room EQ and run through some demo material

Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Need to comment on current technology? Want to share your knowledge with our readers? **Team HCC** is here to help

Copy protection question

Hi. Can anyone tell me what HDCP 2.2 is? And if Sony's VPL-VW500ES projector has it? *Anthony Shim, via Facebook*

Mark Craven replies: HDCP (High-bandwidth Digital Content Protection) 2.2 is a copy protection protocol, which is used to prohibit the replication of encrypted 4K video content – think Ultra HD Blu-rays. For hardware to comply with HDCP 2.2 and to allow playback of encrypted content, it must have an HDCP-protected interface (in the Sony's case, an HDMI port) and not be designed in any way to allow copying. And everything in a video chain (BD player, AV receiver, TV or projector) must support HDCP 2.2 to allow an HDCP-encrypted file to be viewed. In essence, it's an anti-piracy tool.

On to the Sony VPL-VW500ES projector. This is a native 4K model, launched in 2013. And, yes, it supports HDCP 2.2 via its HDMI 2.0 input. However, there's some devil in the detail, as the projector isn't HDR-enabled – so when fed an Ultra HD Blu-ray it won't display it to its full quality. That's certainly something to bear in mind if you're thinking of picking one up second-hand.

Sony's 2013 4K projector doesn't support HDR



Should I upgrade my TV?

Just read Steve May's article on UHD Blu-ray player setup [AV Avenger, HCC #260] and I'm so glad I did as I had trouble getting to the bottom of a picture issue.

Two weeks before Christmas I sold my Samsung plasma TV and got the Sony KD75X8505, ready to embrace the new 4K Blu-ray format. I then waited patiently and eventually bought the Panasonic 4K/Ultra HD Blu-ray player. I installed it like I have done with

other upgrades, turned it on and there was the message 'not connected to an HDR TV'. No way! When I got the TV I checked to make sure it was HDR ready and it was (although when I was doing my digging around not many of the sales guys knew what I was on about regarding HDR). I contacted Panasonic and it didn't help with the HDR message; Sony was even worse and didn't seem to have a clue. Then I did some reading on the internet and

Spoilers be damned!

I feel I have to jump to the defence of your mag and its reviews, with regard to Russell Hogan's moan about film spoilers [Feedback, HCC #260]. I'm sorry, but if you choose not to go and see a film upon release, if you choose not to wait to watch the Blu-ray before reading a review, then boohoo. Spoilers on new releases in the cinema are one thing, but having to walk on egg shells in a magazine that reviews films only upon their disc release is quite another. I don't think you need to adjust your reviews at all. I like the equipment reviews that reference specific elements of a film; it gives context and allows the reader to share the thrill the reviewer had.

This reader thinks you shouldn't change a thing!

Jeff, Australia

Anton van Beek replies: Thanks for your thoughts, Jeff – here's a pic of [SPOILER]...



Take your son to work day wasn't going well

started to get closer to the problem, then read your article.

I went into the HDMI settings on the Sony TV and there it was, the option to set HDMI to 'enhanced'. Now it works fine – but nowhere in any of the manuals does it say to carry out this setup procedure.

I was really fed up with it all because I had just spent over £4,000 on an upgrade. But, like Steve said, anyone who hasn't a clue about what should be on screen won't have a chance. I've done several installs myself for customers when we have built houses so know a fair bit about what's what.

4K is outstanding, but sometimes I wish I'd never got the TV as there are issues with picture quality – mainly contrast – and 3D performance (I know a lot don't like 3D but I do). I would rather pay more and get the XD94 flagship model – what do you think I could do about the upgrade I want?

I've read *HCC* since it first came out and now always look forward to your end piece, Steve. Thanks for my fix in the HDMI menu – my wife and daughter don't snigger anymore at the picture.

Vic, Doncaster

Steve May replies: Glad I could be of help, Vic. Regarding upgrading your TV to Sony's XD94 model (which has direct LED backlighting and will give you a big improvement in contrast/backlighting stability), unless the retailer that sold the X8505 to you is willing to take it as a return (after a considerable amount of time) to be used against a purchase of the XD94 then I fear you may be out of luck. One option might be to sell it second-hand, but that'll leave with you a bigger chunk of change to find.

An alternative would be to stick with it and to experiment with the user settings to try to eke out some image improvements (maybe with a dedicated test disc).

I'm in love with Dolby Atmos!

So after hitting the dozen or so 4K UHD Blu-ray releases I decided to bite the bullet >

Star Letter...

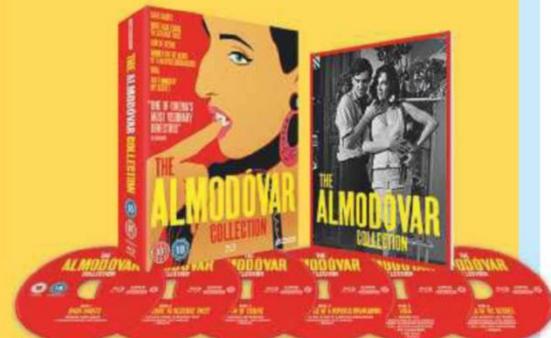
The end of region coding?

In the rush to acclaim the UHD and HDR features of Ultra HD Blu-ray, I think the news that they do not employ region coding or region locking has been a little unheralded.

I wonder at the – hopefully positive – implications of this. For years, through the evolution of DVD and then Blu-ray, movie studios have adopted a senseless attitude to region coding that succeeded only in alienating their audiences around the world, and creating a technically and financially successful industry geared towards defeating it. In pursuit of early or diverse releases, improved quality or better extras, collectors have been forced to import discs and purchase region-free players (or use other nefarious means). And in a world of simultaneous broadcasting and live (legal or illegal) streams, the position of the studios has been rendered ever more redundant.

Now it looks like they have finally recognised the ridiculousness of all this, and quietly slipped region-free into the Ultra HD Blu-ray specification. An admission that maybe region coding wasn't a very good idea in the first place? Or will they turn around at some point and unleash yet another locking technology upon us? Optimistically, I wonder if this will fan the flames of region freedom and studios will stop coding Blu-rays and DVDs altogether. If movie studios have admitted to themselves that the aims of region coding have failed, might we look forward to a bright collecting future free of this blight?

Perhaps region coding will be another story to entertain the kids with, along with floppy disks, audio cassettes (you had to turn them over!), and dial-up modems. And remember when you popped down to



the supermarket to buy your DVD player, stabbed in some strange code on the remote control and pressed the eject button, allowing it to unlock discs from any region? I bought a Pioneer DVD player like that, and there was a slip of paper in the box telling you what the code was! Even the hardware manufacturers know that region coding is a waste of time. So, top of my Christmas wish list this year is a lovely any-region DVD/Blu-ray/Ultra HD Blu-ray combo player! Simon

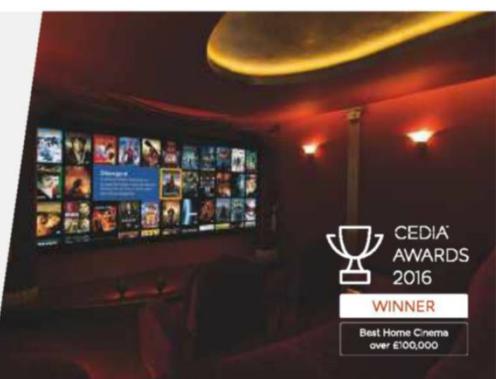
Anton van Beek replies: The region-free nature of UHD BD is a boon for collectors like myself, and is – perhaps – a sign of an outbreak of common sense in the AV industry! Might it see a reduction in region-coding regarding DVD and Blu-ray releases? I'm not sure. While some studios have slowly dropped their passion for region coding over the years, there are often policy differences when it comes to new releases and back-catalogue titles, and multi-partner distribution deals leading to regional variations.

Star letter-writer Simon grabs a copy of *The Almodóvar Collection* on Blu-ray. This boxset boasts brand new restorations of six of celebrated Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar's films – *Dark Habits*, *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, *Law of Desire*, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, *Kika* and *The Flower of My Secret* – alongside new interviews and other bonus features. *The Almodóvar Collection* is available to buy on Blu-ray and DVD from September 19, courtesy of StudioCanal Limited.

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and go for Dolby Atmos. I invested in an Onkyo TX-NR747 receiver and two SKH-410 height speakers.

The difference between TrueHD and Atmos is astounding! Sound spins around the room, dialogue seems crisper and clean. Even *Hancock* and *San Andreas* seem like blockbusters and are well worth a viewing with the Dolby Atmos soundtrack.

One question: even though the disc plays Atmos there doesn't seem to be a menu choice for Atmos, or am I missing something?

Thanks again for your wonderful mag!
Pete

Mark Craven replies: 'Even' *San Andreas*? That's a blockbuster by any definition! And, yes, it has a cracking, OTT, soundtrack.

Anton van Beek replies: Don't worry, you aren't missing anything. The simple truth is that the decision whether or not to specifically label a Dolby Atmos soundtrack as such on a disc menu varies from studio to studio. So, while the Blu-ray from, say, Universal may specifically acknowledge the presence of a Dolby Atmos English soundtrack, one from another studio (possibly Warner Bros.) may just say 'English' on the menu and will only make reference to the fact that it is an Atmos mix on the

packaging. We can only presume that a desire to avoid confusing the average punter with additional technical jargon and the fact that the core TrueHD mix is automatically available for anybody without an Atmos setup may well be behind the decision in those cases.

Help me replace my all-in-one

I have a Logitech Z-5450 5.1 surround system. Now snobs may well turn their nose up at this but it has done an excellent job for me for nearly 10 years. A particularly welcome feature is that the rear speakers are wireless so there's no need for cabling running up and down the length of the room.

Can anyone suggest a moderately priced replacement that will provide at least as good a surround sound experience?

Peter Reynolds

Mark Craven replies: Snob? Not me – I used to own a Logitech surround system (it was my first multichannel setup and perfect for the tiny dimensions of both my living room and my wallet). I enjoyed it, although my 28in CRT TV didn't really do the audio justice.

You don't say why it is you want to upgrade, but I'm assuming you perhaps want something a bit more up to scratch in connection terms? The Logitech Z-5450 offers optical, coaxial

and analogue inputs, but no HDMI hookup or passthrough.

Regardless, replacements with wireless rears (and at a moderate price) aren't exactly common. My first suggestion would be Sony's HT-RT5, which is a soundbar-plus-sub-plus wireless-rears system (so true 5.1) with HDMI inputs, an HDMI output with ARC to connect to your flatscreen, and wireless music streaming functionality. Using a three-channel soundbar rather than the separate left/centre/right speakers of your Logitech set is easier to accommodate in one regard, but it will offer a narrower soundfield and less placement flexibility. And, at around £500, it might be more than what you're looking for.

Another alternative would a traditional all-in-one-system from one of the major brands. Samsung's HT-J7500W offers separate speakers (with wireless rears), plus a Blu-ray player that also functions as an HDMI hub and offers access to catchup TV. This sells for around £450.

Contact us...

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WIN! Great Blu-rays up for grabs...

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Bad Neighbours 2

Seth Rogen, Rose Byrne and Zac Efron return in this outrageous sequel to the hit 2014 comedy. *Bad Neighbours 2* is available to own on Blu-ray and DVD from

September 12, courtesy of Universal Pictures (UK), and to celebrate we've got five Blu-rays to give away...

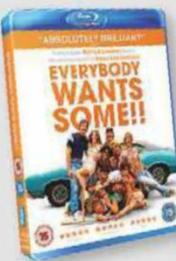
Question:

Zac Efron got his big break in which teen musical film?

Answer:

- A) High School Musical
- B) Grease
- C) Pitch Perfect

Email your answer with 'Bad Neighbours 2' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address!



Everybody Wants Some!!

Take a trip back to the Summer of 1980 with Richard Linklater's new college comedy. *Everybody Wants Some!!* is available on Digital Download from

September 5, followed by BD and DVD on September 19. Thanks to Entertainment One we have five Blu-rays up for grabs!

Question:

Everybody Wants Some!! is a 'spiritual sequel' to which earlier film by Richard Linklater?

Answer:

- A) Boyhood
- B) Dazed and Confused
- C) A Scanner Darkly

Email your answer with 'Everybody Wants Some!!' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address!



The Hills Have Eyes

Wes Craven's seminal 1977 shocker gets a new lease of life on Blu-ray and DVD courtesy of Arrow Video on October 3. As well as a new 4K restoration, Arrow

also promises a host of extra features to keep fans busy long after the end credits roll. To be in with the chance of winning one of five Blu-rays, answer the following correctly...

Question:

Wes Craven directed which of the following?

Answer:

- A) Music and Lyrics
- B) Music of the Heart
- C) The Sound of Music

Email your answer with 'Hills Have Eyes' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address!

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8. Comp winners' info available on request.
9. The closing date is October 6, 2016.



I can't really comment on the sound performance versus the Logitech system as it's been over a decade since I heard the latter. So, as always, try to get a demo before you buy.

Good start for Sky 4K

I upgraded my Sky box to Sky Q earlier this year, mainly so I could access its 4K service that has now finally launched, and I can safely say I'm glad I did.

The movie selection isn't massive at the moment but being able to watch older titles like *Amistad* and *The Godfather* is great, as we're not all interested in modern superhero blockbusters. There's some 4K TV material too, which I may check out even though I ignored some of the shows when they first aired in HD. The football transmissions are a huge improvement in quality over normal channels.

I've found Sky Q to have a few bugs (fixed by unplugging and replugging the set-top box), but hopefully these will be overcome.

Farhan, London

Mark Craven replies: Yep, the launch slate of 4K content on Sky Q (which began mid-August) has been generally pretty good, although it's still early days for the service. Much of the movie catalogue seems to come from Sky's previously announced deal with Sony Pictures, but there are Paramount (*The Godfather*) and Fox (*The Martian*) titles available in UHD, too.

One thing to consider is that 4K viewers may need to pay more attention to HDD capacity – I recorded a Premier League game in Ultra HD and the full 210-minute broadcast took up a mammoth 60GB. Could 2TB soon not be enough? ■

The Logitech Z-5450: an early all-in-one package with wireless rears

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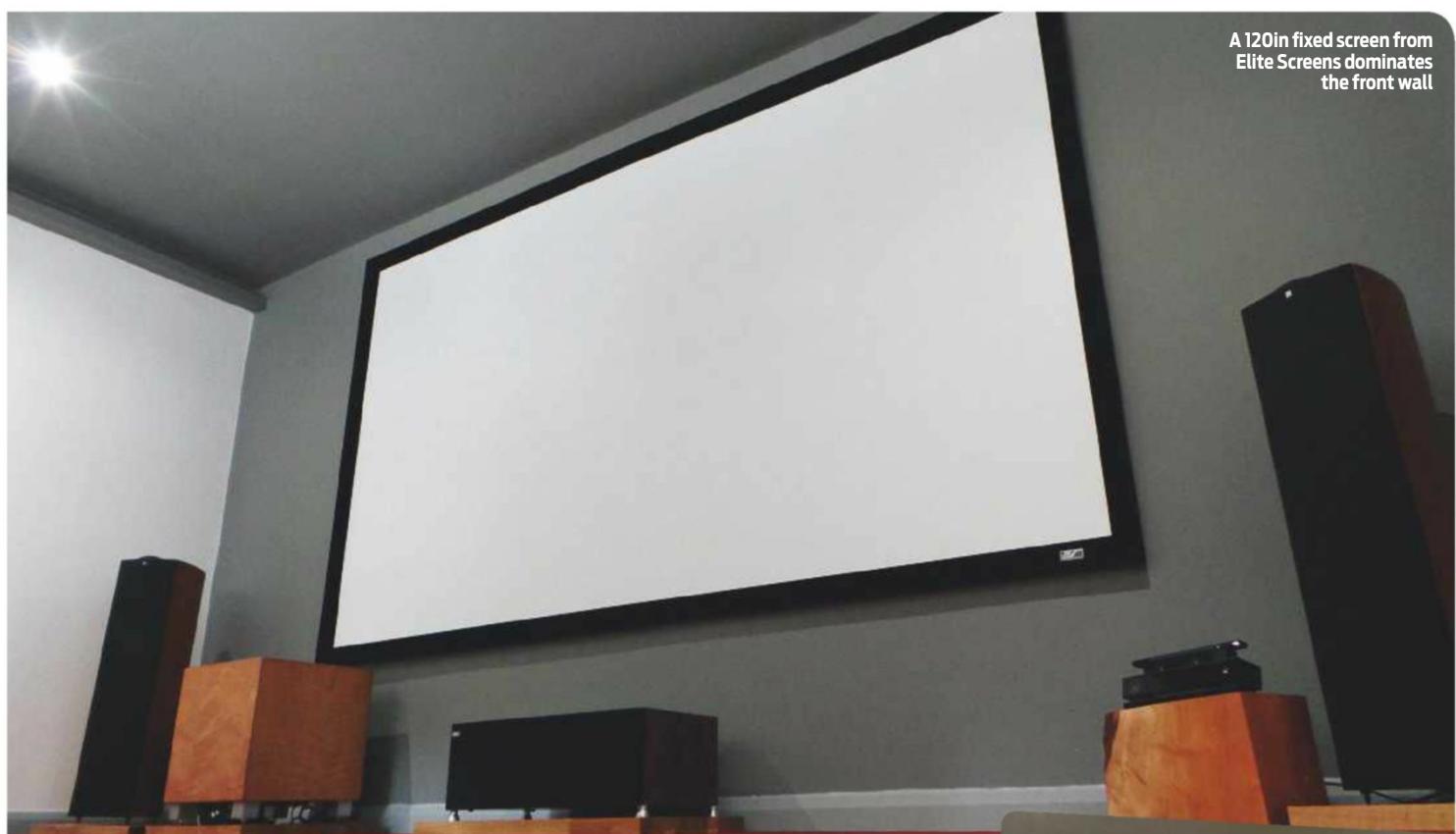
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Certified: AV-Holic!

Formerly a garage-turned-family room, this smart home cinema conversion sports a projection system, 7.1.4 speaker array, back-room bar area and a collection of legacy games consoles. HCC reader **Stephen** invites you to step into his pride and joy



A 120in fixed screen from Elite Screens dominates the front wall



Welcome to the AV-Holic Hall of Fame! Introduce yourself...

Hi, my name is Stephen Miles. I am 41 years old and work as a technology director.

How long have you been into home cinema, and what was the first setup you had?

I've been a home cinema fan for a long time, and as far back as I can remember I have always had a stereo system of some kind connected to my TV.

My first surround sound setup came in around 2002 after visiting a friend (Dan Peck) and hearing how awesome a proper setup could be.

I had a 42in Panasonic flatscreen TV (a 720p model) so started to hunt around on eBay for an amp and some speakers.

I managed to pick up a Denon AVR-3803, a pair of KEF Coda 9s for my front speakers and a KEF Coda 80 for the centre channel. I reused a pair of Denon SC-M50s from my CD player as the rears. All in I spent about £150 and it sounded so much better than my previous stereo system. Since then I have been adding and upgrading components as I find good deals or new technology comes out.

When and why did you decide to build this new cinema room?

In our previous home I never had the space to build a dedicated cinema; my lounge was the best I could manage and really wasn't suitable to have a projector installation.

Volume was also a problem as we lived in a semi-detached house. In 2012 I was forced to move home due to work and I was adamant that the house we bought had to have a suitable space for me to build my cinema room. My wife didn't agree and I'd turned down several houses that she really liked along the way! We managed to find somewhere

The lighting scheme includes Philips Hue LED strips



where the previous owners had converted the double garage to a family room/study that looked perfect to me as the basis for my dedicated theatre.

It looks like a major transformation! How long did it take and did you get help?

In the years since we moved house I drew up my own plans and developed my ideas for what I wanted to build, and in January this

year I decided to get things moving. A close friend of mine runs a small building firm so I gave him a call to help with the building work. We went through the designs and agreed a price. Work started on May 16th and took just over a week to complete. I set myself a budget of £20,000 for both building works and equipment.

Did you stick to the budget?

I did, but only just. The final cost of the project was £19,662.95.

Talk us through the hardware...

The speaker system is a 7.1.4 configuration, with a Denon AVR-X6200W as the main amplifier. I wanted to take advantage of Dolby Atmos and 4K but this receiver only has

'I love the overall experience. Big screen, surround sound... I've been in there every day since it was built'

nine power amps so I have my older Denon AVR-3803 to run the additional two speakers (rear high-left and rear high-right).

The front L/R speakers are KEF IQ7s, the centre is a KEF Q600C. The surrounds and rears are also KEF IQ models (IQ5s and IQ3s respectively). The four ceiling speakers are KEF Ci160CSs, and the subwoofer is a BK Electronics P12-300SB. All speakers are connected with Van Den Hul's The Clearwater Speaker cable, terminated with 24-carat gold-plated banana plugs.

On the video side I'm using a Sony VPL-VW320ES 4K/Ultra HD projector. I went for a 120in fixed screen from Elite Screens – the Sableframe 2 ERI20WH1.

To deliver content I have an Nvidia Shield for Plex and Netflix, etc, a Panasonic UB900 UHD Blu-ray player, plus a Sky+HD box for TV. Then for gaming my main consoles are the PS4, Xbox One and Nintendo Wii U. I also have a collection of consoles but these are only connected up when I want to play them, otherwise they are just on display – PlayStation, PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3, Xbox, Xbox 360, Commodore 64, Commodore Amiga, Atari 2600 (the 'Woody'), Nintendo Game Cube, Nintendo 64 and Nintendo Wii!

It's all controlled from a Logitech Harmony and an Apple iPad.

I also have a second system in my lounge using the Zone 2 output. This feeds an Onkyo TX-NR808 and a Samsung UE65HU8500 TV. The speakers in here are a mix of older ones that were otherwise redundant (KEF, Technics, Denon and Yamaha). I'm on the lookout for some replacements.

What do you love the most about having a dedicated cinema space, and how often do you use it?

I love the overall experience, the big screen, the picture quality, the surround sound. I have been in there every day since it was built. It's a great way to unwind after a long day at work.

We like the lighting you've installed...

Thanks. This is delivered from a pair of Philips Hue LED strips for uplighting and another under the bar at the rear of the room so I can



Turning the previous family space into an Atmos-equipped cinema involved new ceiling and wall work. A professional building firm was used



Our AV-Holic planned his impressive kit storage/in-wall speaker housing from the beginning. Here, it's all starting to take shape

grab a drink without bringing the main lights up. Six spotlights provide downlighting – I would like to upgrade these to the Philips Hue GU10 spots at a later date.

How do you rate the performance of your system, and what's your impression so far of Ultra HD Blu-ray?

I'm very pleased with the overall results. In fact it's exceeded my expectations and experiencing Atmos for the first time has to be one of my highlights.

With a 4K projector and compatible amp I couldn't not go for the UHD player and I wasn't disappointed – the Panasonic looks stunning and also makes a pretty good CD spinner, too.

At the room's rear is a bar/seating area



Stephen wanted recliner seats, but opted to save cash with this sofa



AV gear is housed on Stephen's custom shelving (left)

The room uses a mix of KEF speakers, including four Ci160CS models for in-ceiling heights (above), a Q600C centre (below) and floorstanding KEF IQ7 speakers (right) for the front left and right channels. The latter could soon be replaced by KEF Q900s



compromise on the seating to afford it and went for a sofa instead of proper cinema seats. I'm really pleased that I did.

What's next on your kit list?

I want to upgrade my front speakers to KEF Q900s. And I'm also considering a second BK Electronics subwoofer.

What do friends and family think of the cinema room?

I love to see the reactions from my friends when they walk in for the first time and then when the first waves of 7.1.4 sound wash over them. The family love it as well. Neither my wife or children were convinced while I was



building it, but they are in these just as much as I am now. Our lounge is a little redundant!

What discs do you use to show off the system?

Master and Commander... and Transformers: Dark of the Moon were my previous go-to movies to show off the sound but with Dolby Atmos and 4K I also use *Everest*, *San Andreas* and *Gravity*.

And, lastly, what are your favourite films?

Goodfellas, *Deadpool* and *American Sniper* ■

Share your system in the mag!

If you want to be in **HCC**, you'll need to send us some hi-res images of your cinema room. Here are a few tips for great-looking pictures:

1. Go big. Set your camera to take images at the largest possible size, and at the highest resolution. Don't worry about cropping or resizing – we will make them print-ready.
2. Get in focus. Make sure your photos are as sharp and clear as possible. If you have one, use a tripod, or place your camera on a flat, steady surface and take pictures on a delay. The sharper they are, the bigger we can print them.
3. Let some light in. While we tend to watch

movies in the dark, our cinema systems look their best when they are lit. If you can shoot with natural daylight, do so. If your room doesn't get a lot of light (a garage conversion, for instance) then switch on whatever lights are fitted. Avoid using flash wherever possible.

4. Be thorough. Send photos of as much of the room as possible. Images of both the front and back of the room, the kit rack, speakers, seating, disc shelf, movie poster art... The more the merrier.



5. Don't be shy. Send a picture of yourself!
6. Show us more. Got pictures of your room before it was a cinema? Or snaps of work being done? We love to see these, too.

Email your selection of images to letters@homecinemachoice.com with the subject heading 'AV-Holic'. Provide us with some information about your setup – including a full kit list – and we'll then be in touch.

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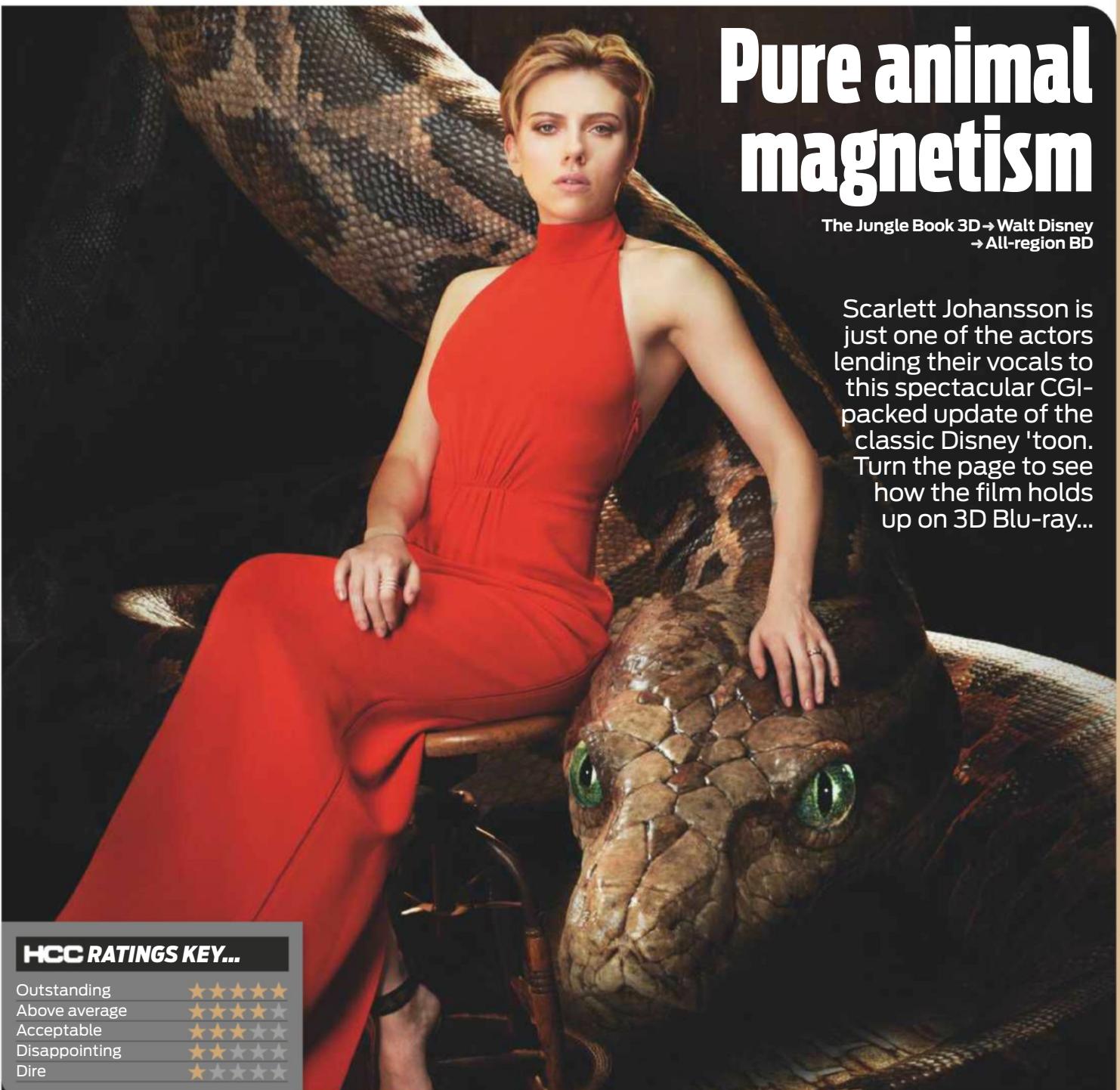
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PLAYBACK

→ **SOFTWARE HIGHLIGHTS** BATMAN V SUPERMAN Superhero slugfest delivers a knockout blow in 4K THE HUNTSMAN: WINTER'S WAR Will this epic fairy tale leave you feeling happy ever after? BAD NEIGHBOURS 2 Girls gone wild! HARDCORE HENRY Innovative actioner explodes onto Blu-ray GOMORRAH It would be a crime to miss this TV series in hi-def & MORE!



Pure animal magnetism

The Jungle Book 3D → Walt Disney
→ All-region BD

Scarlett Johansson is just one of the actors lending their vocals to this spectacular CGI-packed update of the classic Disney 'toon. Turn the page to see how the film holds up on 3D Blu-ray...

HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed

Despite appearances,
The Jungle Book was
mainly shot on
soundstages in
Los Angeles!



Take a walk on the wild side

Forget about your worries and your strife, Disney has got the bare necessities of this remake right



→ THE JUNGLE BOOK 3D

Disney's decision to produce live-action remakes of its beloved animated features continues its winning streak with this visually spectacular blockbuster reworking of *The Jungle Book*.

However, for all of its technological marvels – and make no mistake, this reimagined *Jungle Book*'s state-of-the-art visual effects are truly breathtaking – where the film succeeds is in finding the humanity in a story populated almost entirely by animals. Exciting, heart-warming and occasionally scary, *The Jungle Book* is the best family film we've seen in a long time.

Picture: As you'd expect from a \$175million Hollywood production with painstakingly crafted visuals, the 2D presentation of this updated *Jungle Book* is sensational. Colours are luscious and detailing is meticulous, particularly in close-ups of the film's CG critters.

Unfortunately, the 3D version doesn't achieve the same lofty standards. While the bulk of the stereoscopic encode acquits itself rather well, there's no denying that nighttime scenes suffer from a lack of clarity. More bothersome (but less frequent) is a curious anomaly in a handful of shots where out-of-focus jungle foliage in the background appears to sit further forward in the 3D image than it should. It's not ruinous by any stretch, but can be distracting nonetheless.

HCC VERDICT

***The Jungle Book* 3D**

→ Walt Disney Home Entertainment

→ All-region BD → £28

WE SAY: Disney's latest reimagining of *The Jungle Book* dazzles in HD – but fans should stick to the 2D version for the best results

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

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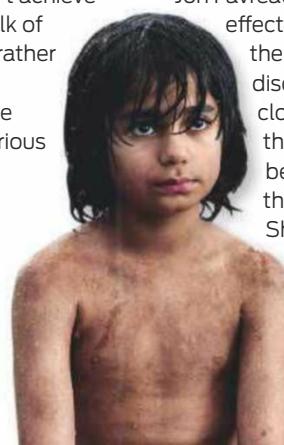


Audio: *The Jungle Book*'s DTS-HD MA 7.1 mix is also a stunner. While the jungle buzzes with life throughout the film, it's sequences such as the water buffalo stampede (Chapter 6) and the encounter with Kaa (Chapter 8) that rock your setup with powerful and creative use of the rear and surround channels. Our only complaint is that although *The Jungle Book* featured a Dolby Atmos mix on its theatrical run, Disney stubbornly refuses to support the object-based audio format on Blu-ray.

Extras: *I Am Mowgli* (eight minutes) studies the casting of newcomer Neel Sethi in the lead role and the challenges he faced in making the movie. Meanwhile, *King Louie's Temple: Layer by Layer* (three minutes) plays the *I Wanna be Like You* musical number – only this time cutting back and forth from the finished film to various behind-the-scenes elements (pre-viz, raw on-set footage, etc).

Of more interest will be *The Jungle Book: Reimagined*, a 36-minute feature that finds director Jon Favreau, producer Brigham Taylor and visual effects supervisor Robert Legato recalling the making of the film. Along the way they discuss the original concept (which skewed closer to Kipling's original stories than the Disney animation), reveal the thinking behind the use of puppet performers during the shoot, and pay tribute to the late Gary Shandling, who voiced Ikki the porcupine.

Rounding things off is an audio commentary by Favreau that's well worth a listen.



Eye in the Sky

Entertainment One → Region B BD £25



A superb cast including Helen Mirren and the late Alan Rickman (in his final role) brings plenty of gravitas to this nail-biting thriller exploring the complex moral, legal and political implications of drone warfare. This a thoughtful and challenging flick that asks difficult questions while simultaneously exciting with its tense ticking-clock structure. While the extras it harbours are lacking in depth (the two featurettes clock in at just 90 seconds each), this UK Blu-ray still comes up trumps with its cleanly rendered 2.40:1-framed 1080p video and active DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundscape.



The Boy

Entertainment in Video → Region B BD £20



The Walking Dead's Lauren Cohan takes time out from dodging zombies to play Greta, a young nanny whose latest charge turns out to be a life-size porcelain doll with eccentric 'parents' that treat it like a real boy. When strange things start happening around the house Greta begins to wonder if the doll may actually be alive after all. Sadly, despite the solid cast and intriguing setup, *The Boy* tries so hard to provide a clever new spin on its central conceit that it forgets to be scary. Still, on a positive note, this BD's 2.40:1 Full HD encode and DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix are both first-rate.



Everybody Wants Some!!

Entertainment One → Region B BD £25



Following the success of 2014's *Boyhood*, director Richard Linklater shifts gears once again and serves up a spiritual sequel to his 1993 hit *Dazed and Confused*. Where that film played out on the last day of school in 1976, this raunchy and witty nostalgia-fest follows a house full of college baseball players in 1980 over the weekend leading to the start of term. *Everybody Wants Some!!* arrives on Blu-ray with a bright and colourful AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode, joined by a front-heavy DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix that excels at handling the pop music-infused soundtrack. Extras are fun if not hugely insightful.



Parenthood versus sisterhood

An added feminist perspective results in a surprisingly chucklesome comedy sequel

→ BAD NEIGHBOURS 2

Making a successful comedy follow-up is a tricky thing. You can't just run through all the same jokes again, but at the same time you can't move too far away from the basic setup that people responded to first time around. This sequel to the 2014 comedy hit *Bad Neighbours* solves the problem by giving the original premise a gender flip, mixing the familiar low-brow gags with astute social commentary.

Mac (Seth Rogen) and Kelly Radner (Rose Byrne) find their plans to sell their home hitting rocky waters when a rowdy sorority moves into the house next door. So far, so familiar. But using as its starting point the (genuine) ruling that forbids sororities to throw parties (they can only attend those hosted by fraternities), *Bad Neighbours 2* sets out to make

some smart points about male-female double-standards (plus inter-generational conflict) amongst all of the self-aware joking around and pratfalls. And if this sounds a little unwieldy, the good news is that the cast (especially Rogen, Zac Efron and Chloë Grace Moretz) give it their all. If you enjoyed the first one, you'll no doubt like this second helping.

Picture: As with its predecessor, *Bad Neighbours 2* lands on Blu-ray with an attractive AVC-encoded 2.40:1 1080p transfer packed with punchy primary colours, deep black levels and

Can you spot the real six-pack?



natural skin tones. Edges are well defined. It's not the most visually adventurous movie, but still looks great in hi-def.

Audio: As with most comedies, dialogue is the real driving force here. However, this doesn't mean that the film's DTS-HD MA 5.1 has nothing else to say for itself, with the raucous party scenes marrying deep bass to atmospheric use of the surrounds.

Extras: Enjoyable bonus goodies take the form of an audio commentary by co-writer/director Nicholas Stoller and producer James Weaver; 12 deleted scenes; a gag reel; outtakes; and four featurettes. *Nu Neighbours* (eight minutes) looks at making a sequel, *The Prodigal Bros Return* (six minutes) focuses on the returning Delta Psi cast members; *Girls Rule* (six minutes) chats to the actresses playing the sorority sisters, and *The Ultimate Tailgate* (five minutes) deals with shooting one of the film's key set-pieces.

HCC VERDICT

Bad Neighbours 2

→ Universal Pictures
→ All-region BD → £25

WESAY: This gender-flipped comedy sequel delivers plenty of laughs and a satisfying Blu-ray platter

Movie:

Picture:

Audio:

Extras:

OVERALL:



4K disc packs a punch

AV quality is the winner when the Man of Steel fights the Bat of Gotham in the extended cut of this superhero slobberknocker...

DISC
OF THE
MONTH



Batman v Superman... may be a 4K superhero, but how does it hold up on 3D Blu-ray?

Like most action epics these days, *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* hit cinemas in both 2D and 3D incarnations. But, with 3D off-limits

where 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray is concerned, the only way to experience the funny spex version of the film at home is to pick up the *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice 3D – Ultimate Edition* Blu-ray.

This set includes a trio of BD50 platters: one to host the 183-min 'Ultimate Edition' cut, one to host the original 152-min theatrical cut and all the extras, and the final one for the theatrical cut in 3D. No doubt the fact that the film was converted in post rather than being shot natively in 3D is the reason why no stereoscopic version of the new, longer cut exists.

It's also worth noting that the quality of such conversions have come on in leaps and bounds in the past few years (rushed efforts like 2010's *Clash of the Titans* are now the exception, not the rule). As it happens, first impressions of the stereoscopic 1080p version of *Batman v Superman...* are very good, with the dream sequence that opens the film providing some tangible negative parallax effects.

However, while the heavily stylised nature of the cinematography pays off with daylight footage, lensing shots such as the one pictured (right) convincing volumetric depth, darker scenes fare less well. Due to this, sequences you'd expect to really benefit from the 3D conversion – such as the titular superhero showdown – look resolutely flat and are



rendered harder to follow due to the drop in clarity. This all comes to a head in the film's final showdown. Here, locked-off shots help separate characters from the on-screen chaos surrounding them, while the bulk of the fast-cut action simply looks more muddled.



→ BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE – ULTIMATE EDITION

Critics may baulk at the prospect of even more *BvS*, but there's no doubt that pouring 30 minutes of extra footage back into the mix for this 'Ultimate Edition' helps flesh out the narrative of Zack Snyder's *Justice League* prequel. Clark Kent is the biggest beneficiary, as we see him flex his investigative reporting skills, and uncover the twisted depth of Lex Luthor's machinations.

Of course, the longer cut doesn't fix everything. Jesse Eisenberg still irritates, the Martha MacGuffin is clunky and the geography of Gotham and Metropolis makes little sense. But Zack Snyder's mythic take on his principals is defiantly epochal.

This isn't a light-hearted jape. Instead it channels Frank Miller through Alex Ross, and opens the door to Jack Kirby's *New Gods/Fourth World* mythology. For anyone who grew up with Christopher Reeve in the blue suit, suffered through the *Quest for Peace*, and thought DC had lost the plot with *Green Lantern* and *Jonah Hex*, this is nothing short of a gift.

With its Parademon-infested premonition and Mother Boxes aplenty... *Dawn of Justice* makes no attempt to hand-hold a mainstream audience, but that just reinforces its geek appeal. One of the new sequences has Luthor, seemingly in thrall to Steppenwolf, minion to Darkseid and the big bad lined up for next year's *Justice League* flick. This is exciting stuff. Keep up, keep up...

Picture: The 4K HDR iteration (this is the first UHD release to utilise a three-layer disc) is bundled with a regular Blu-ray, which provides some interesting comparisons. To be clear, the regular BD is entirely serviceable, if a little drab-looking. But spin the 4K HDR disc and you're looking at an entirely different film. The colour palette is beautiful, with even the simplest scenes richer and more evocative.

When Lois brings Perry the bullet sample from the desert shootout, she's almost silhouetted against exterior windows. A white hoarding glows bright outside, while adjacent buildings are yellow; Lois' face is dulled in shadow. The same sequence on the Blu-ray has no colour detail through the window, and Lois' face looks at least two stops brighter.

Zack Snyder often holds on Supes up in the sky. In HDR, the clouds around him are dramatic, a portentous orange with breakthrough sunlight and blue skies. On SDR Blu-ray, the Man of Steel hovers in a boring sea of grey and white. When you get to the explosive Doomsday climax, the beat-down is simply breathtaking. If you want to show off your new HDR telly to your mates, dial this up. Or the opening Zod battle, that's a doozy too.

There are fewer resolution differences, but the 2,160 presentation does snap with extra clarity every so often. In short, this really is a great-looking disc.



Just one of the film's portentous hints of things still to come...

Audio: With its brooding Hans Zimmer score and ground-shaking audio effects, the soundtrack to *BvS* delivers reference-quality mayhem. You get a Dolby Atmos mix which folds down to an equally glorious 7.1 on non-Atmos AV receivers. Both border on divine, and are similar enough to dissuade comparison.

When Bruce Wayne first spots the Kryptonian World Engine, suspended above Metropolis in the film's opening scene, we're just seconds away from a concussive shock wave that rolls through the room. LFE is a huge component in this mix. The realistic thud of shattering masonry as Superman careens into the Wayne Corp building has impressive weight, the sonic destruction utterly believable.

You know how *Avengers: Age of Ultron* sounds? Well, this is the exact opposite. There's real theatrical dynamism here. *BvS* delivers a masterclass in blockbuster audio mixing.

The fight sequences also sound fabulous. When the Bat duels it out, punches hurt, plaster shatters... it's bruising stuff. Then Wonder Woman's Amazonian theme kicks in and you can't help but grin.

Extras: While there's no room for extras on the 4K platter, you'll find over two hours' worth on the regular Blu-ray. And there are some real treats.

Uniting the World's Finest explores how Zack Snyder and producer Geoff Johns have reworked the DCU for the big screen. Essentially establishing the

'Trinity' and their backstory, it also showcases some intriguing behind-the-scenes footage.

A Meeting of Giants may seem an obvious portrait of the protagonists, but it's lifted above mere puff piece by the inclusion of plenty of DC comic book history.

Similarly, *The Warrior, The Myth, The Wonder* is a fascinating mini-doc on Wonder Woman, with some delightful contributions from Pete Marston, son of Wonder Woman's creator.

Production addicts are well served too. *Batcave: Legacy of the Lair* breaks down the inspired production design of Patrick Tatopoulos, while *Accelerating Design: The New Batmobile*, reveals the creation of Batman's latest wheels – from napkin doodle, through CAD to final road-ready beast (spoiler: it's a real hardcore ride). On top of this, other supplements cover costume design and even bat conservation...



Fans can expect to see Wonder Woman (below) in a solo film next year



HCC VERDICT

Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice – Ultimate Edition

→ Warner Bros. → Ultra HD Blu-ray
→ £35

WESAY: Stunning 4K HDR visuals and reference-quality audio make this longer cut truly epic.

Movie: ★★★★☆

Picture: ★★★★☆

Audio: ★★★★☆

Extras: ★★★★☆

OVERALL: ★★★★☆

Arcade Action

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. **Rik Henderson** checks out a videogame vying for time on your home cinema system...



No Man's Sky

Hello Games → PS4/PC → £50/£40

There have been many blockbusters released for the PS4 in the last few years but none have captured the imagination quite as ferociously as *No Man's Sky*. It wowed audiences at every public outing before release, while retaining an aura of mystery.

That's because, no matter how gorgeous it looked, or how mind-boggling the idea of a quoted 18 quintillion discoverable planets may be, we never really learned much about the gameplay. Some even suggested it wasn't a game at all. Thankfully, they were wrong.

At its heart *No Man's Sky* is a crafting and survival game – sort of a *Minecraft* for grown-ups. You collect elements through zapping objects on planets you visit, and use them to build better weapons, tools and even a spacecraft. And it is a space flight and trading simulator to boot – like *Elite Dangerous* but with simpler controls.

Where it differs from many peers is that it is a much calmer experience. You can pootle around forever, without going anywhere near the end goal. That in itself is purposely vague – just find the centre of the universe and, we suspect, the meaning of life – but the best part of *No Man's Sky* is that it doesn't force it upon you.

Instead, the game encourages discovery with its procedurally generated universe of oh-so-many systems and planets, and provides many little stories and surprises along the way. There are few moments where you need to battle in the skies, for example, and there is little in the way of urgency. While that might sound dull to some, it's actually an incredibly addictive experience.

Graphically it is stunning. The colour scheme and aesthetic is inspired by '50s and '60s sci-fi flicks, with interesting hues on planets and beyond. The orchestral score is beautiful too, giving the experience a cinematic feel. We've also seen the game played in 4K on PC, even though we tested the PS4 version, and it is more incredible still. Details and lighting are magnificent in Ultra HD. You will need a super-powered graphics card, but should you get the chance to play it this way, you'll be so glad you did.

No Man's Sky is not your average blockbuster, but you'll be playing it long after the latest *Uncharted* and *Tomb Raider* titles have been popped back into the drawer. Superb.



11.22.63

Warner Bros. → All-region BD
£28



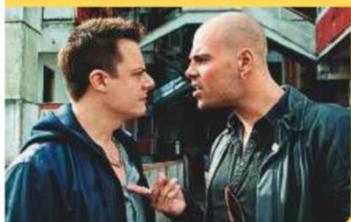
Based on a Stephen King novel, this eight-part miniseries stars James Franco as an English teacher who uses a portal to 1960 to try and prevent the assassination of J.F.K. Like you would.

As daft as the premise sounds, *11.22.63* actually works pretty well – although it could have survived being shorn of a couple of episodes to cut down on padding. This Blu-ray release splits the episodes across two platters and serves up detailed 1.78:1 visuals and capable DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics. A 15-min behind-the-scenes featurette is the sole extra.



Gomorrah: Complete Seasons 1 & 2

Arrow Films → Region B BD
£40



Like Matteo Garrone's 2008 film of the same name, this Italian crime drama takes its title from the non-fiction book by Roberto Saviano, but spins its own riveting story about a criminal gang operating in the suburbs of Naples. What unfolds is basically Italy's answer to *The Wire*, albeit told entirely from the criminals' point of view as the Camorra clan confronts rival gangs and internal power struggles. This seven-disc set delivers crisp 1080p 1.85:1 presentations of both seasons, with LPCM 2.0 Italian audio for the first and DTS-HD MA 5.1 on the second. Two in-depth *Making of...* videos are also included.



Gotham: The Complete Second Season

Warner Bros. → All-region BD
£40



While the young Bruce Wayne and James Gordon are still the heart of the show, this second season improves on the first by serving up a bigger roster of bad guys and devoting much more screen time to their loopy antics. This four-disc Blu-ray release also showcases *Gotham*'s excellent production values with its eye-catching 1.78:1 1080p video and involving DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio. Worthwhile extras take the form of two character videos, a Comic-Con panel and a featurette about the show's film noir leanings; the rest are little more than glorified promo spots.





Aussie actor Chris Hemsworth has come a long way since *Home and Away*

Hunting for a reason to exist

Because Snow White has always been crying out for a sequel she doesn't even appear in...

→ **The Huntsman: Winter's War – Extended Edition**

A deliberate attempt to build a film franchise out of a fairy tale, 2012's *Snow White and the Huntsman* transformed the original story into a spectacular fantasy epic and its titular heroine into an armour-clad warrior princess.

Four years later, this cinematic endeavour has borne fruit and the sequel is here. But instead of the continuing adventures of Kristen Stewart's Snow White, we have a new adventure for Chris Hemsworth's huntsman Eric. Hmm...

Both prequel and sequel, *The Huntsman: Winter's War* retcons the backstory of Queen Ravenna (Charlize Theron) to add a sister, Freya the Ice Queen (Emily Blunt), who whiles away her days kidnapping children and turning them into an army of Huntsmen/Huntswomen. Which is what happened to Eric. But he was banished and left for dead after falling in love with fellow warrior Sara (Jessica Chastain), which is a big no-no as far as the cold-hearted Freya is concerned.

The action then jumps forward to after the events of *Snow White and the Huntsman*, where it turns out that Ravenna's magic mirror has gone missing. So it's up to Eric to save the day at Snow White's behest (not that she could be bothered to ask in person). But with Freya

and her army also searching for the mirror, there's no guarantee of anyone living happily ever after.

Not content with a story that somehow manages to be both over-complicated and underdeveloped, this unnecessary sequel is also populated with incredibly dull characters. Heck, the only time the film really bursts into life is when the deliciously wicked Ravenna is up to no good, but her screen time is understandably curtailed this time around.

In the words of *Frozen*'s ice queen Elsa, when it comes to this ailing fantasy franchise, Universal should do the decent thing and 'let it go...'

Picture: The BD's 2.40:1 Full HD presentation is quite simply outstanding. Detailing is exquisite, colours are bold and black levels are rock solid. In other words, it's everything you'd expect from a modern Hollywood production.

Audio: The DTS:X soundtrack is even more exciting than the visuals, with Freya's penchant for conjuring up ice walls ensuring that there are plenty of height elements in the mix. Spacious and dynamic, it's a superb piece of sound design.

Extras: In addition to 'Theatrical' and 'Extended' cuts of the film, this Blu-ray finds space for a director's commentary, four deleted scenes, a gag reel and five *Making of...* featurettes. Not bad at all.



Kristen Stewart's absence makes room for Jessica Chastain and Emily Blunt



HCC VERDICT

The Huntsman: Winter's War – Extended Edition

→ Universal Pictures → All-region BD
→ £25

WESAY: A very impressive Blu-ray presentation of an unfocused and unnecessary fairy tale sequel.

Movie: ★★★★☆

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★





Game over for this gimmick

First-person action extravaganza ultimately makes for second-rate cinema

→ HARDCORE HENRY

Is your idea of heaven spending an hour or two watching YouTube videos of other people playing first-person shooter games? If so, then we can only presume that you're the target audience for Ilya Naishuller's adrenalin-fuelled debut feature.

Like most arcade games, *Hardcore Henry*'s plot (a mute cyborg must rescue a beautiful lady from a sadistic villain) is nothing more than a reason for a nonstop barrage of gunfire and explosions. But what really cements the film's affiliation with videogames is the decision to shoot the entire thing from Henry's point of view, a trick achieved by strapping a bespoke camera rig onto the heads of the 'additional cameramen' (aka stunt men) who play Henry.

It's an ingenious trick and one that leads to a couple of audacious sequences (most notably the road chase, pictured right). However, this is a 96-minute film, not an arcade game, and the rigid adherence to a first-person viewpoint quickly grows tiresome. More troubling still is that the filmmakers make no attempt at exploring what it means to put the viewer into Henry's place and make them directly complicit in the murder of hundreds of people throughout the film.

It all feels like a bit of a missed opportunity. What we hoped would be a movie that was both innovative and worth talking about instead proves to be in desperate need of an involving plot.

Picture: Given that it was shot entirely using GoPro cameras, it'll come as no surprise to learn that *Hardcore Henry*'s 1.85:1-framed picture doesn't rank among the best-looking 1080p encodes you'll ever



see. Sharpness, or more precisely the lack of it, is the biggest issue here with the limitations of the source material resulting in a lack of the finely wrought textures you expect from a modern title on Blu-ray. This is offset somewhat by the fact that the camera is rarely static long enough for softness to become a major problem.

Audio: Aside from occasional bouts of motion sickness, the first-person viewpoint ensures that the film's DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix makes impressive use of the entire soundstage. The viewer is always grounded (as Henry) in the heart of the onscreen action. Surround effects, including dialogue, are persistent and utterly convincing, while bass positively booms. Great stuff!

Extras: The only extra on EiV's UK Blu-ray is a chat-track by Naishuller and actor Sharlto Copley. Universal's US platter also houses a second commentary, fan questions and four deleted scenes.

HCC VERDICT

Hardcore Henry

→ Entertainment in Video
→ Region B BD → £25

WE SAY: By turns exciting, annoying and nauseating, *Hardcore Henry* is the film equivalent of watching somebody else play *Call of Duty*.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

The Wave

StudioCanal → Region B BD
£23



Seismic activity in the cliffs surrounding a fjord threatens to unleash a massive tsunami on a picturesque village in this Norwegian disaster film. Unlike its glossier Hollywood brethren, this 'Scandisaster' flick is an altogether more intimate and sombre affair, which is no bad thing as it brings a real sense of danger and unpredictability. The 2.40:1 1080p encode and DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix on this Blu-ray prove up to the task of bringing the onscreen destruction to life, with Chapters 6 and 7 providing plenty of AV thrills and spills in particular. Sadly, there are no extras whatsoever.

The Bloodstained Butterfly

Arrow Video → Region A/B BD & RI/2 DVD → £18



Duccio Tessari's rather restrained 1971 murder mystery lacks the stylised bloodletting and visual flourishes of the most iconic examples of the Italian *gialli*, but delivers a complex and gripping whodunnit for genre fans. Restored from the original 2-perf Techniscope camera negative at L'Immagine Ritrovata in Bologna, *The Bloodstained Butterfly* hits Blu-ray with a strong 2.35:1 1080p encode exhibiting rich colours and an authentic grain structure. The LPCM mono audio is of a similarly high quality. As usual, the extras are generous and informative.

Southbound

StudioCanal → Region B BD
£23



Directed by several V/H/S series veterans, this collection of five interwoven tales of terror and penance on a desolate stretch of desert highway is one of the better horror anthologies to come along recently – with David Bruckner's gory and blackly comic *The Accident* being the standout effort. Despite some obvious instances of anamorphic lens distortion at the sides of the image, this BD's 2.40:1 imagery stays strong throughout, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix brings the John Carpenter-inspired score to life. An audio commentary by the filmmakers is the disc's sole extra feature.

Tale of Tales

Curzon Artificial Eye → Region B BD
£20



Like the best fairy tales, Matteo (*Gomorrah*) Garrone's first English-language film fully embraces the violence, eroticism and humour of the three fables it weaves together. This absolutely gorgeous (and rather mad) fantasy film cuts a stunning figure in hi-def, with the lustrous 2.40:1 1080p encode making the most of sunny locations and opulent costumes. If the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix isn't quite as attention-grabbing, it still serves the material well. Bonus bits include an hour-long *Making of...*, plus interviews with Garrone and actors Salma Hayek and Toby Jones.



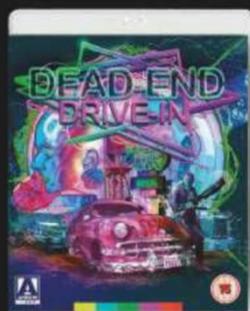
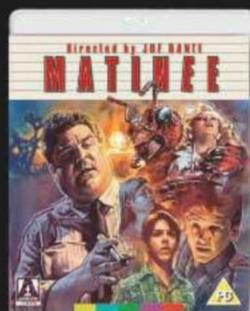
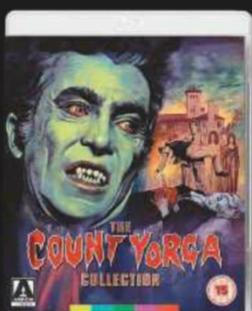
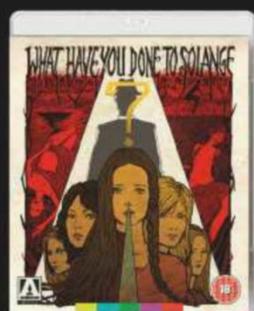
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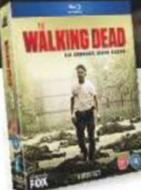
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Now that's what
you call a dead-end...



A brand-new world of pain

Acclaimed horror TV series is still finding ways to surprise and shock with its sixth year

→ **THE WALKING DEAD: THE COMPLETE SIXTH SEASON**

More than ever before, this sixth year of *The Walking Dead* feels like a show of two halves. Building out of the events that closed the fifth season, the first nine from this year's batch of 16 episodes deal almost exclusively with the fallout from an attempt to lead a horde of thousands of 'walkers' away from the Alexandria settlement. Naturally, things don't go entirely according to plan.

Following a small jump forward in time, the last seven episodes deal with Rick (Andrew Lincoln) and the rest of the show's protagonists learning about the bigger world that lies beyond the walls of Alexandria. It turns out that they are far from alone in this new world and that there are bigger threats out there than the undead.

With this latest season, *The Walking Dead* once again proves much more satisfying when binge-watched than when viewed on a weekly basis. Stripped of the lengthy gaps between episodes, the early 'fake-out' that so enraged fans on the show's original broadcast is turned into just another wrinkle in the ongoing story.

The real high point, however, is the season's second half. The expansion of the world of *The Walking Dead* is more than welcome for the story possibilities it brings, and the way the writers have Rick *et al* handle the emerging situation really impresses. As dark as *The Walking Dead* has got in the past, it's never been so keen to highlight the



extreme lengths they will go to keep their group alive. They may be survivors, but they're definitely not heroes any more...

Picture: As with previous years, this sixth run of *The Walking Dead* was shot on 16mm, giving the show a gritty aesthetic that matches the tone of the material perfectly. And as with the previous Blu-ray boxsets, this results in a series of wonderfully film-like AVC 1.78:1 Full HD encodes.

Colours look natural, fine object textures are cleanly rendered and black levels are suitably deep and imposing. Best of all, by limiting it to no more than four episodes to a disc (although most only house three), there are no compression-related issues such as banding, aliasing or other artefacts.

Audio: This may be a TV show, but on BD it arrives with DTS-HD Master Audio 7.1 soundtracks. And they're crackers, too, filling your viewing room with expansive use of the entire soundfield. Spatial cues are incredibly effective and deployed with real confidence, adding another layer of zombie terror to the onscreen action.

Extras: The first five discs in the set are used to house the 16 episodes, with the only extras here being an extended version of the season finale and cast and crew commentaries for seven key episodes.

Other extras are housed on the sixth disc. Here's where you'll find deleted scenes; 16 *Inside The Walking Dead* vignettes; 16 *The Making of The Walking Dead* videos; and six featurettes looking at topics including the most memorable zombies, departing characters, and new bad guy Negan.

HCC VERDICT

The Walking Dead: The Complete Sixth Season

→ Entertainment One
→ Region B BD → £50

WE SAY: The popular survival-horror TV series returns with yet another scarily good Blu-ray package

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

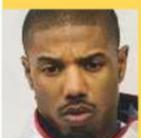
OVERALL: ★★★★★

Kiss of DeathSignal One Entertainment
Region B BD → £18

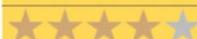
This excellent 1947 film noir stars Victor Mature as Nick Bianco, a former crook turned informant who finds himself in hot water when he testifies against psychotic hoodlum Tommy Udo (Richard Widmark), only for Udo to beat the rap and come looking for revenge. This Blu-ray outing makes the most of the film's location shooting on the streets of New York, with the 1.37:1-framed 1080p encode conjuring up a compelling vision of the city. Backing up the naturalistic visuals is an equally well-presented LPCM mono soundtrack. A commentary, trailer and interview with Widmark (shot in 2002) are also included.

**Jane Got a Gun**Lionsgate → Region B BD
£23

The combination of a troubled production history and a muddled script ensure that this Western about a woman (Natalie Portman) defending her home from outlaws never lives up to its potential. For all the feminist aspirations of its title, it's rather depressing to see Portman's Jane continually relying on the help of an old flame (Joel Edgerton), rather than having the gumption to stop the baddies all by herself. Possibly due to the difficult production (or the fact it's just not very good), Lionsgate hasn't bothered with any extras on the Blu-ray. At least the film itself looks and sounds excellent.

**Creed**Warner Bros. → Ultra HD Blu-ray
£30

This Ultra HD upgrade of writer-director Ryan Coogler's superb *Rocky* spin-off doesn't really land a knockout punch with its 2160p HDR visuals, but it's not about to throw in the towel either. There's a clear refinement in detail over the 1080p presentation (although the digital source is a 2K rather than 4K master), while colours are noticeably richer, and the expanded dynamic range works well with the high-contrast visual style used during the fight scenes. As with the original Full HD Blu-ray (also included in this release), the soundtrack is a punchy DTS-HD MA 7.1 affair.

**In the Heart of the Sea**Warner Bros. → Ultra HD Blu-ray
£30

Ron Howard's hit-and-miss whaling drama is the latest 2K upconvert to try and make a splash on Ultra HD Blu-ray, and it's not destined to be a 4K Blu demo disc. Differences between the 1080p and 2160p visuals aren't as pronounced as you might hope when it comes to fine detailing – possibly due to the amount of CG and grading the film was subjected to in post. The impact of its HDR makeover is more pronounced, however. As with the earlier Blu-ray, the excellent Dolby Atmos mix is the real highlight here.



Girl of Steel packs a punch

This fresh, funny and energetic series continues DC's smallscreen winning streak

→ **SUPERRGIRL: THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON**

While the folks at DC have spent the past few years struggling to play catch-up with arch rival Marvel on the bigscreen, the one area where they continue to reign supreme is in smallscreen superheroics. *Arrow* and *The Flash* first showed how to successfully transition popular comic book heroes from the printed page to a long-form TV series, and *Supergirl* is yet another success.

Far removed from the grim 'n' gritty world of *Batman v Superman*..., *Supergirl* offers a hopeful and optimistic take on the genre. Key to this is the casting of Melissa Benoist, who brings precisely the right combination of vulnerability, pluck and inner strength to the role of Kara Zor-El as she learns to embrace her superhuman abilities.

Elsewhere, Calista Flockhart (*Ally McBeal*) is the show's biggest surprise as CatCo Worldwide Media founder Cat Grant. What could easily have been a typical 'bitchy boss' role is transformed into something much more inspirational, while never losing the character's knack for a stinging put-down.

As with any new series, *Supergirl* has its fair share of growing pains, especially when it tries to find its footing in its early 'villain of the week' episodes. But it doesn't



take too long to settle down, and by the time *The Flash* (Grant Gustin) races over for a crossover episode it really is firing on all cylinders.

Picture: Despite initial concerns about the decision to cram all 20 1.78:1 1080p-encoded episodes onto just a trio of discs, *Supergirl* still holds up pretty well on Blu-ray. There is some banding to be seen and blacks aren't always as deep as we'd like, but colours are bright and detailing is generally strong.

Audio: *Supergirl*'s DTS-HD MA 5.1 mixes have clearly been done with TV broadcasts in mind. Dialogue and the score are the priorities here, with directional effects mainly focused on the front L/C/R speakers. It's fine, as far as it goes, but given the subject matter there's plenty of room for improvement.

Extras: Bonus bits take the form of a 2015 Comic-Con Panel (15 mins), featurettes about the Martian Manhunter (10 mins) and Krypton (11 mins), deleted scenes and a gag reel.

HCC VERDICT***Supergirl: The Complete First Season***→ Warner Bros. → All-region BD
→ £40**WESAY:** A solid start for DC's latest superhero series, but both the show and Blu-ray could be even better.**Movie:** **Picture:** **Audio:** **Extras:** **OVERALL:** 



Boxset has a sting in the tail

We've heard of the jailhouse blues, but these Blu-rays take things a bit too far

→ FEMALE PRISONER SCORPION: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION

Welcome to the world of 'Pinky Violence'. The result of mixing together two different aspects of Japanese exploitation cinema – the brutality of Yakuza crime films and the sensuality of so-called 'Pink' erotic flicks – the 'Pinky Violence' genre blossomed in the 1970s as Japanese studios attempted to woo local audiences into cinemas with something that their TV couldn't give them. Standing tallest of all in this genre was the deadly female convict known by friends and enemies alike as Scorpion.

Based on the manga by Toru Shinohara, the extremely stylish *Female Prisoner #701: Scorpion* (1972) introduced theatre-goers to the taciturn Sasori/Scorpion (Meiko Kaji), the former girlfriend of a corrupt cop who set her up to be raped as part of a plan to bust a rival gang. Ending up in prison herself, Sasori fends off other inmates and sadistic guards while planning her revenge. A slick mixture of art and sleaze, the film was a hit with audiences and three sequels followed in quick succession.

Female Prisoner Scorpion: Jailhouse 41 (1972) is arguably the best of the bunch and finds Scorpion and six other inmates on the run in an increasingly surreal story culminating in a brutal bus hijacking.

Female Prisoner Scorpion: Beast Stable (1973) saw series director Shunya Ito bow out with a nightmarish film involving incest, a one-armed policeman and a vicious female hoodlum.

Director Yasuharu Hasebe took the reins for Meiko Kaji's swansong as Sasori, *Female Prisoner Scorpion: #701's Grudge Song* (1973). A slightly more



down-to-earth effort, the film lacks the visual flair and over-the-top lunacy of earlier instalments in the series.

Picture: Arrow's four 2.35:1 Blu-ray encodes are based on a set of low-contrast 35mm prints supplied by Toei Studios and the results are... problematic. Not only are there major issues with grain structure and density, the films (especially the sequels) exhibit a very strong cyan push to the colour palette that is not only utterly unnatural, but is unlike any versions of the films that we've seen before.

Audio: Each title features a restored LPCM 1.0 mono Japanese soundtrack that does the best with the source material. Perfectly acceptable stuff, but hardly likely to get your pulse racing.

Extras: Arrow's boxset includes fan appreciations, interviews and trailers for each movie, plus visual essays about actress Meiko Kaji and the ...*Scorpion* franchise, a poster and a 56-page booklet.

HCC VERDICT

Female Prisoner Scorpion: The Complete Collection

→ Arrow Video → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £60

WE SAY: Problematic transfers take the shine off an otherwise great set for fans of 'Pinky Violence' flicks.

Movie: ★★★★☆

Picture: ★★★★☆

Audio: ★★★★☆

Extras: ★★★★☆

OVERALL: ★★★★☆

The Samurai Trilogy

Criterion Collection → Region B BD

£25



This two-disc set collects together Hiroshi Inagaki's 1950s trilogy of films based on the life of legendary 17th century Japanese swordsman Musashi Miyamoto. What they

lack in historical veracity, they more than make up for in sheer entertainment. *Samurai I: Musashi Miyamoto* and *Samurai II: Duel at Ichijoji Temple* share a disc, while *Samurai III: Duel at Ganryu Island* gets one all to itself – and in each case the 1.37:1 encodes full justice to the lush Eastmancolor photography. Extras include trailers and interviews with historian William Scott Wilson about the real events that inspired each film.



Love & Peace

Third Window Films → Region B BD

£20



Shion Sono's latest tells the story of a failed rock star whose pet turtle is flushed down the toilet and found in the sewers by a mysterious hobo who uses magic pills to bring abandoned toys to life. A mix-up with the pills results in the turtle being given the ability to grant wishes, which it uses to turn its former owner into a rock 'n' roll superstar, although with every wish the turtle grows bigger and bigger. This delightfully bonkers flick cuts a fine figure on Blu-ray thanks to its sharp 1.85:1 visuals and dynamic DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio. Also included is a 24-min featurette about the making of the film's special effects.



Police Story: Lockdown

Kaleidoscope → All-region BD

£15



Yet another reboot of the popular Jackie Chan franchise, *Police Story: Lockdown* (aka *Police Story 2013*) is far darker in tone than any of its predecessors and serves up a gripping little hostage drama that favours tension and emotional intrigue over stunts and fights. Despite hitting mainland Chinese cinemas in 3D, this UK Blu-ray sticks to a well-defined but resolutely 'flat' 2.40:1 presentation. Mandarin and English language tracks are provided in both DTS-HD MA 5.1 and LPCM 2.0 flavours. Extras include four interviews and a short *Making of...* video.





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Collecting...

The Dark Knight

Has *Batman v Superman* left you with a yearning for more Bat-tastic Blu-rays and DVDs? Then let **Team HCC** guide you through the very best Dark Knight discs money can buy...

THE DARK KNIGHT

Celebrated by critics and fans alike on its original release, Christopher Nolan's follow-up to *Batman Begins* still rates as the gold standard that all other comic book films must measure up to. Every bit as meticulous in its exploration of its characters' psyches as it is in the orchestration of its action set-pieces, *The Dark Knight* has more in common with the films of Michael Mann than with any of its superhero movie brethren. And then, of course, there's Heath Ledger's astonishing turn as the Joker, which updates the former 'Clown Prince of Crime' into a terrifying agent of chaos.

Get it: *The Dark Knight* has been re-released on Blu-ray numerous times, but the discs themselves are always the same. However, *The Dark Knight Trilogy: Ultimate Edition* Blu-ray boxset adds an exclusive bonus disc of extras, plus various collectibles.



Heath Ledger plays his cards right as *The Dark Knight*'s Joker



BATMAN (1943)

The Caped Crusader and his faithful sidekick Robin first hit the bigscreen back in 1943 in this 15-part serial that recasts the duo as secret government agents on the trail of sinister Japanese criminal mastermind Dr. Daka. Watched today, this creaky old serial is a bit dull (and pretty bigoted), but remains notable for introducing the Batcave to Batman lore.

Get it: Still unavailable in the UK, so you'll have to import the old barebones R1 DVD released in the US in 2005 by Sony Pictures.



THE LEGO MOVIE

Phil Lord and Christopher Miller's hilarious animated hit may have told the story of ordinary LEGO minifigure Emmet, but it's real star was Batman. Voiced by Will Arnett, this Dark Knight is a self-obsessed jerk who gets the best gags and the best song (*Untitled Self Portrait*). Next year he's even getting his own spin-off movie. All together now: 'Darkness. No parents. Super rich. Kinda makes it better...'

Get it: Take your pick from DVD, Blu-ray (either 2D or 3D) and even 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray.



BATMAN (1989)

Director Tim Burton hit the big time with this darker and more violent take on the traditional superhero flick. While Michael Keaton does fine work as Bruce Wayne/Batman, the entire film is stolen out from under him by both Jack Nicholson's Joker and Anton Furst's awe-inspiring production and set design.

Get it: Available as a standalone release and in the *Batman: The Motion Picture Anthology* boxset, the Blu-ray serves up a solid VC-1 encode, dynamic Dolby TrueHD 5.1 sonics and plenty of extras.



BATMAN BEGINS

1997's *Batman & Robin* seemed to try its hardest to kill off the franchise, but Batman made a triumphant return to cinemas in 2005 under the stewardship of Christopher Nolan. Going back to basics, this action-packed reboot covered Batman's origin story, with the likes of Christian Bale and Liam Neeson adding serious dramatic chops to the comic book material.

Get it: Best stick with *The Dark Knight Trilogy* BD boxset (see above).





BATMAN (TV SERIES)

Oooff! Thwack! Ker-splloosh! Beloved by fans for its camp style and colourful array of characters, this charming live-action TV series clocked up an impressive 120 episodes between 1966 and 1968, with an equally tongue-in-cheek cinema outing sandwiched between its first and second seasons. An all-time classic, not to mention one of the wackiest TV shows ever made.

Get it: Following years of legal hassles, the series finally arrived on Blu-ray in 2014, and it looks superb. The spin-off movie had no such troubles and hit BD in 2008.

TOP
PICK



BATMAN: THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS

Frank Miller's startling 1986 comic about an aging Batman coming out of retirement established the 'grim and gritty' superhero trope and was a key influence on this year's *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*. Thankfully, unlike that live-action film, this two-part animated adaptation is an absolutely blast from start to finish, and succeeds surprisingly well in bringing Miller's complex story to the screen.

Get it: Originally released in two parts, fans should instead import the later feature-packed *Deluxe Edition* all-region BD from the US.



BATMAN RETURNS

Darker, edgier and altogether much more interesting than its predecessor, Tim Burton's sequel to his 1989 blockbuster is a feast of freaks and weirdos that's more in keeping with his larger body of work. With Batman relegated to little more than a supporting role in the story, the film turns its attention to Danny DeVito's grotesque Penguin and Michelle Pfeiffer's sizzling Catwoman. It's kinda like a surrealist masterpiece masquerading as a superhero blockbuster.

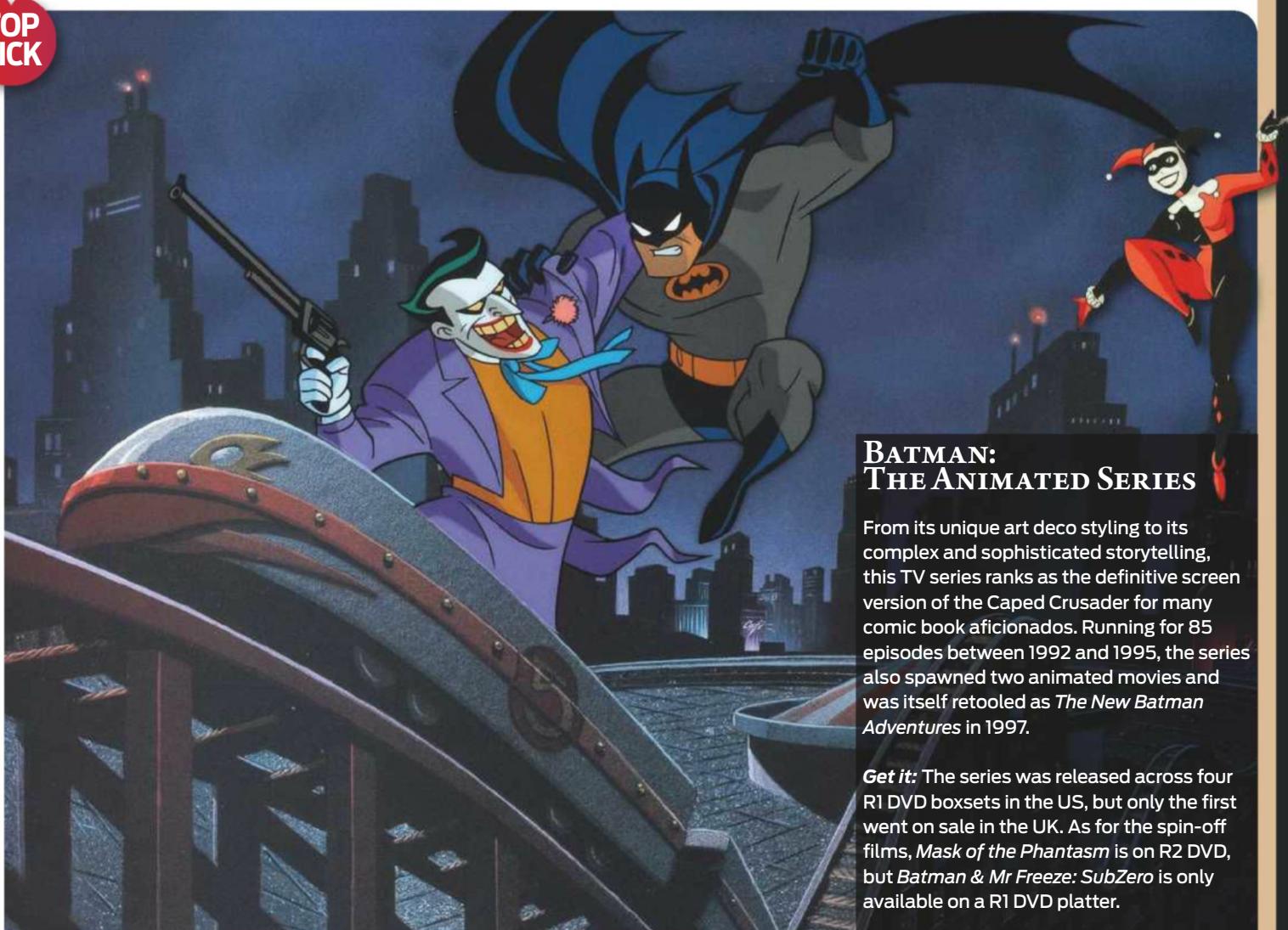
Get it: Once again, the *Batman: The Motion Picture Anthology* Blu-ray boxset is the way to go.



BATMAN: THE KILLING JOKE

Reuniting *Batman: The Animated Series* voice actors Kevin Conroy and Mark Hamill, this recent animated adaptation of Alan Moore's controversial graphic novel expands on the original tale with greater focus given to the relationship between Batman and Batgirl. Audiences have been divided on this new material, but there's no denying that the actual adaptation of *The Killing Joke* itself is a huge success.

Get it: The UK Blu-ray (reviewed last issue) sports impressive picture and sound – although extras could have been better.



BATMAN: THE ANIMATED SERIES

From its unique art deco styling to its complex and sophisticated storytelling, this TV series ranks as the definitive screen version of the Caped Crusader for many comic book aficionados. Running for 85 episodes between 1992 and 1995, the series also spawned two animated movies and was itself retooled as *The New Batman Adventures* in 1997.

Get it: The series was released across four R1 DVD boxsets in the US, but only the first went on sale in the UK. As for the spin-off films, *Mask of the Phantasm* is on R2 DVD, but *Batman & Mr Freeze: SubZero* is only available on a R1 DVD platter.

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Awards 2016-2017



The European Imaging and Sound Association (EISA) is the technology world's largest independent awards panel, incorporating over 45 specialist magazines – including *Home Cinema Choice* – from 23 European countries.

EISA's goal is simple: to celebrate the most desirable, highest-performing home entertainment hardware that you – the AV enthusiasts – will be spending your hard-earned pennies on. The featured awards here are the

selections from the Home Theatre Video and Home Theatre Audio expert groups, covering everything from 4K HDR TVs and Ultra HD Blu-ray players to speaker packages, soundbars, projectors, AV receivers and more. Chosen after a lengthy judging process throughout the Summer, during which the member magazines convene and whittle down a shortlist, these can be considered the cream of the consumer electronics crop. Read on...

EUROPEAN HT RECEIVER 2016-2017

DENON AVR-X2300W

The AVR-X2300W is about as fine an example of a well-priced 7.2 AV receiver as you could hope to find. A well-built and stylish-looking receiver, it supports UHD Blu-ray passthrough via its HDMI 2.0a connectivity, and will connect to numerous sources via Wi-Fi, Bluetooth and its traditional AV inputs. Integration into a home theatre is easy, thanks to an informative, user-friendly setup wizard. But it's the sound performance that really impresses. This is an AV receiver that's as comfortable handling low-level subtleties as it is room-filling dynamics, and Dolby Atmos decoding is on hand to bring the 3D surround experience from premium cinemas to your home, while DTS:X will arrive as a software update in the near future.



**Best Product
2016-2017**

HT RECEIVER

Denon AVR-X2300W

**EUROPEAN HT HIGH END 2016-2017****TRINNOV AUDIO ALTITUDE³²**

Serious home cinema enthusiasts seeking the very best experience need look no further than Trinnov Audio's Altitude³². Able to output up to 32 discrete channels, this is no ordinary home cinema processor. Advanced, fully-customisable room optimisation and equalisation enables it to tailor its sound to the specific speaker layout and characteristics of a home theatre, and it will map any Dolby Atmos, DTS:X or Auro-3D native feed without breaking into a sweat. The outcome is a reference-class performance, with the Altitude³² bringing astonishing clarity and definition, scale and presence, to movie soundtracks. Software-based architecture means it is ready for future updates, and despite its state-of-the-art feature set, operation is always easy with networked control from a PC, smartphone or tablet.



**Best Product
2016-2017**

**HT HIGH END
Trinnov Audio Altitude³²**

**EUROPEAN SOUNDBAR 2016-2017****YAMAHA YSP-5600**

By providing Dolby Atmos support (and DTS:X via a future firmware update), 4K-capable HDMI connectivity and automated room EQ, the gorgeously styled YSP-5600 is a fully-featured soundbar. No fewer than 46 drivers behind its robust black metal mesh are used for directing soundbeams to create full 7.1.2 audio, delivering a layered, three-dimensional soundfield that is unbelievably huge. It makes every movie an engrossing experience, and as part of Yamaha's MusicCast multiroom system, it can be used to stream music and TV audio throughout the house. Calling this just a soundbar is perhaps unfair on the rest of the field – the YSP-5600 has a unique set of skills that make it a class apart.



**Best Product
2016-2017**

**SOUNDBAR
Yamaha YSP-5600**



EUROPEAN SOUNDBASE 2016-2017

CANTON DM 55

The smallest of three models in Canton's soundbase range, the Bluetooth-enabled DM 55 boasts opulent construction – available in lacquered black, silver or white – and a thick glass slab for providing a robust platform on which to place your TV. With six drivers at its disposal – two tweeters, two midrange and a pair of woofers – driven by a 200W amplifier, it delivers a far larger soundstage than it has any right to. With unerring agility and attack it's able to deliver roaring spaceships, crackling lightsabres and bombastic explosions with real bite and punch. It's equally adept when it comes to showing a touch more finesse, handling finely-detailed effects with surprising sensitivity. It's a great partner for a home theatre TV.

EUROPEAN ULTRA HD PLAYER
2016-2017**PANASONIC DMP-UB900**

The world's first Ultra HD Blu-ray player brings an instant upgrade to your AV experience. Its 4K HDR images are a clear improvement over Full HD BD, overflowing with detail, smooth colour gradations and quite extraordinary dynamics. But that's not all the Panasonic DMP-UB900 has up its sleeve – peerless upscaling of 1080p discs, super-fast loading and a well-equipped DLNA client make this the Swiss knife of Blu-ray players, handling every job that's thrown at it in a masterly no-fuss manner. Premium sound quality is assured by its high grade audio parts and THX certification for 4K picture and sound sources. It's the Ultra HD capability that's the headline here – combine this player with an HDR 4K display and you'll be grinning from ear to ear.



ULTRA HD PLAYER
Panasonic DMP-UB900

**EUROPEAN HT SPEAKER SYSTEM
2016-2017****DALI OPTICON 5.1**

Ideally suited for medium-to-larger-sized rooms, this accomplished system is as assured pumping out music as it is firing movie surround soundtracks around the room. Replacing DALI's IKON range, the OPTICON 5.1 speaker system, including the SUB K-14 F subwoofer, aims to be accessible to a wide audience without compromising on performance. And it doesn't disappoint – featuring paper/wood fibre driver technology handed down from the flagship EPICON range, combined with Soft Magnetic Compound motors and DALI's hybrid tweeter module, it manages to deliver a perfect mix of refinement and muscle. The result is a deep, atmospheric bed of surround sound, peppered with crisp effects that pan seamlessly around your home theatre room. Throw in the beautiful build and gorgeous styling and you've got the perfect package.

**Best Product
2016-2017****HT SPEAKER SYSTEM
DALI OPTICON 5.1**



**Best Product
2016-2017**

BEST VALUE HT SPEAKER SYSTEM

Monitor Audio Bronze 5.1



**EUROPEAN BEST VALUE HT
SPEAKER SYSTEM 2016-2017**

MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE 5.1

As entry-level speaker ranges go, you'll have to go a long way to find a more beautiful and better bolted together series than Monitor Audio's Bronze. The secret behind its success is revealed in the company's custom one-piece C-CAM cones, employed for the first time in the Bronze series and which use their entire surface to radiate sound. The defining characteristic of the Bronze 6, Centre and FX speakers is their sublime high-frequency reproduction, which bursts with detail and texture. Dialogue, meanwhile, is solid and focused, the speakers handle dynamic shifts with consummate ease, and Monitor Audio's W10 subwoofer anchors the performance with slamming subterranean rumble. It's a thrilling multichannel ensemble.

**EUROPEAN HIGH-END TV 2016-2017****LG SIGNATURE OLED65G6**

For reference-grade picture performance look no further than this 65in OLED TV. Employing LG's self-emissive panel technology, and supporting premium Dolby Vision HDR content as well as Ultra HD Blu-ray and 4K streaming, the Signature OLED65G6 TV is truly state-of-the-art. Image quality is exemplary, with an enormous contrast range made possible by the screen's unrivalled black level, plus natural, bright colours and silky-smooth motion. A further benefit of OLED is that it allows for a display panel thickness of just 2.57mm, ensuring this TV looks remarkable even when it's switched off. It's partnered here with a slim stand that integrates a powerful sound system, and can be detached to cater for wall-mounting. It is a worthy winner of EISA's High-End TV accolade.



**Best Product
2016-2017**

HIGH-END TV

LG SIGNATURE OLED65G6

**EUROPEAN HOME THEATRE TV
2016-2017****PANASONIC TX-65DX902**

The Ultra HD era brings not only four times the number of pixels of Full HD, but improved colours and image dynamism with HDR. Panasonic's flagship TX-65DX902 TV showcases these new features with real skill. With HDR sources, the local dimming backlight guarantees exceptional brightness and deep blacks, the panel is capable of a wide colour range, and the 65in screen offers an immersive visual experience – vivid, sometimes dazzling, sometimes dark, always close to reality. And, importantly, this LCD giant is an astonishing performer with Full HD and even standard-definition content, offering an upscaled picture quality that's unspoiled by artefacts. This TV is an ideal centrepiece for a premium movie room, complemented by impactful audio.



**Best Product
2016-2017**

HOME THEATRE TV

Panasonic TX-65DX902

EUROPEAN TV 2016-2017

SAMSUNG UE55KS9000

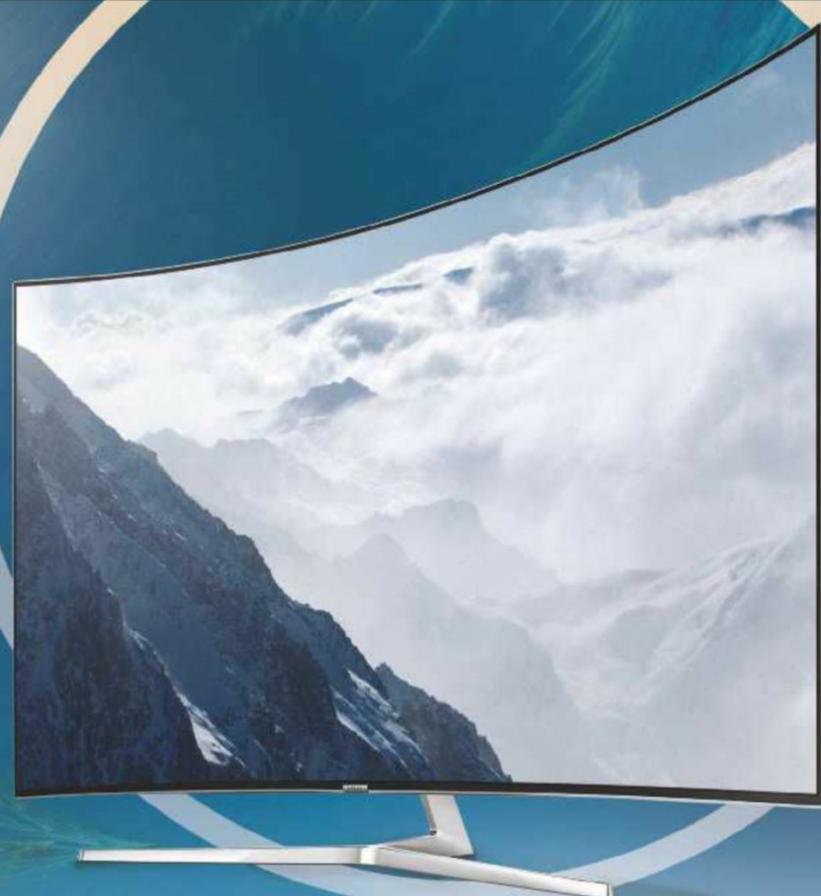
This 55in TV combines breathtaking design with a superior performance. Certified by the Ultra HD Alliance as meeting the technological demands of premium HDR (High Dynamic Range) images, Samsung's UE55KS9000 employs a Quantum Dot 10-bit panel and edge LED illumination to craft rich, subtly-blended colours, dazzling peak whites and a robust black level. It's a perfect partner for HDR, 4K and HD sources. Equally striking are the ultra-thin bezel and curved body, while excellent usability comes via Samsung's Tizen-based interface and the external One Connect Mini box to manage inputs effectively. It's an accomplished all-rounder.



**Best Product
2016-2017**

TV

Samsung UE55KS9000



EUROPEAN SMART TV 2016-2017

LG UH770V

At the heart of this Ultra HD TV, available in sizes from 49in to 65in, beats the third generation of LG's webOS smart TV system, with new features – including Magic Mobile smartphone connection via the LG TV Plus app and a redesigned remote control – making the user experience better than ever. The colourful icon-based menu bar means content is easy to access from a variety of sources, and day-to-day operation is intuitive and fun. Furthermore, LG's Magic Sound Tuning feature ensures the performance of the onboard 20W stereo speaker system is tailored to the viewer's environment, and with support for both HDR 10 and Dolby Vision video formats, the UH770V matches smart skills with enjoyable images.



**Best Product
2016-2017**

SMART TV

LG UH770V



**EUROPEAN BEST BUY
LARGESCREEN TV 2016-2017**

PHILIPS 65PUS7601

There's a wealth of technology at work in Philips' well-priced 65PUS7601 that ensure its performance matches the ambitions of its 65in screen size. The sophisticated direct LED backlight system uses 128-segment local dimming, delivering stable, deep blacks and detailed shadows to the sharp Ultra HD image. Adjustable Perfect Natural Motion settings let the user tune the picture to their tastes, and the 10-bit panel supports HDR sources. The result is convincing largescale movie and TV playback. Add in Philips' three-sided Ambilight, Android smart TV system, advanced remote control and punchy sound quality and you have an impressive TV.



**Best Product
2016-2017**

BEST BUY LARGESCREEN TV
Philips 65PUS7601

**EUROPEAN HOME THEATRE
PROJECTOR 2016-2017**

BENQ W2000

BenQ's W2000 proves that cinematic images can be achieved at an affordable price – this Full HD DLP projector offers razor-sharp pictures bursting with detail, and can throw a 100in image from a mere 2.5m away. A high luminance, plus an expansive contrast performance make it suited to use both in a blacked-out room and a well-lit environment. A Rec.709 preset, and professional calibration support guarantee lifelike, vibrant colours and natural skin tones usually the preserve of projectors twice the price – the W2000 is therefore ready for all your 2D (and 3D) entertainment. And if you need the most flexible installation solution it offers an optional wireless HD transmission kit for a cable-free connection. It's a brilliant bigscreen option.



**Best Product
2016-2017**

HOME THEATRE PROJECTOR
BenQ W2000

EUROPEAN PHOTO & VIDEO CAMERA 2016-2017

SONY α7S II

With the α7S II Sony provides professionals with the right tool to create top quality video and excellent still images in every shooting situation. Its 12.2-million-pixel full-frame Exmor CMOS sensor masters high sensitivity shooting, with a maximum sensitivity of ISO 409600. In addition its high dynamic range, 5-axis image stabilisation, and internal recording of 4K movies in full-frame format with full pixel readout ensure that the professional videographer won't have to make any compromise regarding image quality. The camera's Fast Intelligent AF excels in speed and accuracy and guarantees stunning images with excellent sharpness even in the dark.



EUROPEAN AV ACCESSORY 2016-2017

SPIN REMOTE

Home entertainment enthusiasts are used to controlling multiple devices with multiple remotes, often leading to a frustrating experience. SPIN remote flips the control concept on its head with a revolutionary new design that favours simplicity over complexity. This sleek silver dome is packed with sensors so that it can detect motion, rotation, orientation and touch, allowing the user to take control using a series of gestures and movements. Via an intuitive smartphone app, different functions can be assigned to the controller depending on how it is held, making operation of your devices – TV, speaker system, smart lighting – way more fun than it has any right to be.



EUROPEAN ACTION CAMCORDER 2016-2017

OLYMPUS TG-TRACKER

The TG-Tracker combines the legacy of Olympus' popular Tough series compact cameras with the versatility of action cameras to give a new kind of tool for the adventurous photographer. Offering 4K video recording with a 204-degree angle of view, as well as 8-million-pixel still photos, the TG-Tracker specialises in tracking direction, position, air pressure, temperature and acceleration through the roughest trips. The TG-Tracker is shock proof, dust proof, waterproof, freeze proof and crushproof, records quality stereo sound, and can communicate via Wi-Fi or HDMI. Retaining Olympus' acclaimed imaging technology, the TG-Tracker weighs only 180g.

And the rest of the EISA Awards from Hi-Fi, Photo, Mobile and In-Car Electronics

Hi-Fi

EUROPEAN HIGH-END LOUDSPEAKER 2016-2017

Bowers & Wilkins 802 D3

EUROPEAN LOUDSPEAKER 2016-2017

ELAC Debut F6

EUROPEAN COMPACT AUDIO SYSTEM 2016-2017

Naim Audio Mu-so Qb

EUROPEAN TURNTABLE 2016-2017

Pro-Ject The Classic

EUROPEAN STEREO SYSTEM 2016-2017

Marantz CD6006 & PM6006

EUROPEAN NETWORK MEDIA PLAYER 2016-2017

Bluesound NODE 2

EUROPEAN HIGH-END DAC 2016-2017

Hegel HD30

EUROPEAN HIGH-END HEADPHONES 2016-2017

AKG N90Q

EUROPEAN MULTIROOM SYSTEM 2016-2017

Sonos PLAY:5

EUROPEAN USB DAC/HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER 2016-2017

(Combined award with Mobile Devices Expert Group)

Chord Mojo

Photo

EUROPEAN DSLR CAMERA 2016-2017

Canon EOS 80D

EUROPEAN PROSUMER DSLR CAMERA 2016-2017

Nikon D500

EUROPEAN PROFESSIONAL DSLR CAMERA 2016-2017

Canon EOS-1D X Mark II

EUROPEAN CONSUMER COMPACT SYSTEM CAMERA 2016-2017

Olympus OM-D E-M10 Mark II

EUROPEAN PROSUMER COMPACT SYSTEM CAMERA 2016-2017

Sony α6300

EUROPEAN PROFESSIONAL COMPACT SYSTEM CAMERA 2016-2017

Fujifilm X-Pro2

EUROPEAN PREMIUM COMPACT CAMERA 2016-2017

Sony Cyber-shot RX1R II

EUROPEAN TRAVEL COMPACT CAMERA 2016-2017

Panasonic Lumix DMC-TZ100

EUROPEAN DSLR LENS 2016-2017

Tamron SP 85mm F1.8 Di VC USD

EUROPEAN PROFESSIONAL DSLR LENS 2016-2017

Canon EF 35mm F1.4L II USM

EUROPEAN DSLR ZOOM LENS 2016-2017

Sigma 50-100mm F1.8 DC HSM Art

EUROPEAN PROFESSIONAL COMPACT SYSTEM LENS 2016-2017

Sony FE 85mm F1.4 GM

EUROPEAN COMPACT SYSTEM ZOOM LENS 2016-2017

Fujinon XF100-400mm F4.5-5.6 R LM OIS WR

EUROPEAN PHOTO INNOVATION 2016-2017

Panasonic DUAL I.S. System

EUROPEAN PHOTO SOFTWARE 2016-2017

DxO OpticsPro 11

EUROPEAN PHOTO PRINTER 2016-2017

Canon imagePROGRAF PRO-1000

Mobile

EUROPEAN ADVANCED SMARTPHONE 2016-2017

HTC 10

EUROPEAN CONSUMER SMARTPHONE 2016-2017

Huawei P9

EUROPEAN MOBILE HEADPHONES 2016-2017

JBL Reflect Mini BT

EUROPEAN MOBILE SPEAKER 2016-2017

JBL Charge 3

EUROPEAN WEARABLE DEVICE 2016-2017

Garmin fēnix 3 HR

EUROPEAN BUDGET SMARTPHONE 2016-2017

Coolpad Torino

EUROPEAN VR HEADSET 2016-2017

HTC Vive

EUROPEAN MOBILE INNOVATION 2016-2017

LG G5

EUROPEAN SMARTPHONE CAMERA 2016-2017 (Combined award with Photo Expert Group)

Samsung Galaxy S7 / S7 edge

In-Car Electronics

EUROPEAN IN-CAR HEAD UNIT 2016-2017

Kenwood DDX5016DAB

EUROPEAN IN-CAR HD PLAYER 2016-2017

Sony RSX-GS9

EUROPEAN IN-CAR SMART UPGRADE 2016-2017

Match M 5DSP

EUROPEAN IN-CAR SUBWOOFER 2016-2017

Hertz Mille Legend ML 2500.3

EUROPEAN IN-CAR PROCESSOR 2016-2017

Audison bit One HD

EUROPEAN IN-CAR HIGH-END COMPONENT 2016-2017

Ground Zero GZPA Reference 4PURE

EUROPEAN IN-CAR INTEGRATION 2016-2017

Mosconi GLADEN DSP 8TO12

AEROSPACE

EUROPEAN IN-CAR INNOVATION 2016-2017

Clarion Full Digital Sound



For more information on EISA visit: www.eisa.eu



AV Avenger

Steve May ventures out of his cinema room to experience a VR-powered amusement ride, and soon decides he'd rather be hunting imaginary beasts on his 'phone instead

THERE'S A NEW attraction at Thorpe Park this year – Derren Brown's Ghost Train. With an elaborate setup, it promises to 'reinvent the classic ghost train experience for a new generation' using HTC Vive Virtual Reality headsets. For many it will be their first taste of VR.

I was invited along to a launch evening for the ride, which also included the rest of the park. This is obviously an enormous privilege; having unfettered zero-queue access to some of the best thrill rides in the UK is gloriously exciting. Not as exciting was the chance to see the bunch of celebs that had turned up, airlifted in from things called *TOWIE*, *Love Island*, *Geordie Shore* and the like. **I really didn't know who most were, and had them pointed out to me.** They were a rough sort. Jacob

Anderson (aka Grey Worm from *Game of Thrones*) was also around but sadly I missed him.

It's got to be said that the staging for Ghost Train is superb. The location, a faux Victorian railway station peppered with toxic gas and infection warnings, is terrific, and as you shuffle to the PG13-rated ride there are diversions to get you in the mood. If you've ever been to any of Brown's live shows (and you should, they are fantastic in the most literal of senses), you'll recognise the influence of the man himself. Visitors are urged not to reveal 'the secrets of the Ghost Train' for fear of spoiling the experience for others. So I won't. But I will say that what follows doesn't come close to this meticulous build up.

Caught by the fuzz

Hustled into a Victorian coach, 'guards' urged us to quickly don our VR headsets. They don't fit well. My headset is heavy and hurts the bridge of my nose. The display isn't calibrated; everything looks a bit

fuzzy. I can't really hear much either because the volume is low. I think only one earpad has found an ear. I started missing my home cinema.

During the experience (no spoilers) I became convinced that the VR software had broken down. I'm stuck in a green-ish mist. Nothing is happening, except for a skull-face-thing which loops around and around. This appears to go on for an age (but probably doesn't) before the cycle breaks and the 'story' ends. Or rather stops. At this point I'm ejected to buy Derren Brown merch. I confer with other Ghost Train riders who report the same thing. I'm eventually told the ride was experiencing 'technical issues', which is fair enough. Teething problems are to be expected with these things.

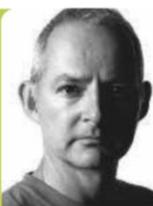
Perhaps the true horror of the Ghost Train is hygiene. The idea of strapping a Vive headset onto my face (if you haven't tried one they're like a full-face scuba diving mask), that's literally been shoved onto the heads of thousands of snuffling punters before me, is deeply disgusting. Don't tell me these headsets are sanitised between rides because I won't believe you. Heaven alone knows what contagion the cast from *Made in Chelsea* passed on.

Suddenly I realise those posters about plague and quarantine that precede the ride aren't props. They're genuine. I can't say I wasn't warned before boarding.

Juxtapose this VR experience with *Pokemon Go*. All around the park that night people were happily wielding smartphones, stopping every few steps to lob Pokeballs at Pidgey and Magikarp. If you ask me it's Augmented Reality, not VR, that's the real 2016 entertainment goldmine. I love Derren Brown, but if I have to leave my movie den, I'm hitching my ride to the Pikachu train ■

Will you be adding Virtual Reality to your AV lifestyle? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

Steve May likes this profile pic because he believes it can hypnotise you with his laser-like stare. And it makes him look younger





musicCast

Wireless Music System



YSP-5600



HDCP 2.2 AirPlay Bluetooth Wi-Fi ECO High-Res Audio



Soundbar began with Yamaha

Continuing to innovate and invent to this very day, the world's first object based audio enabled soundbar was a Yamaha. The YSP-5600 offers real surround sound from a single bar at the front of your room and included in Yamaha's MusicCast multi-room system.



MusicCast Controller App



For more info visit yamaha.com/musiccast

PM-1



Planar Magnetic Headphones

“ PM-1 is painstakingly engineered and a true object of desire... Comfortable to wear and great to listen to, this is easily the most exciting new headphone to be released this year. ”

Hi-Fi News July 2014

“ the OPPO needs to be on your shortlist ”

AV Forums April 2014



“ Its headphone amplifier stage is up there with the finest ”

Hi-Fi+ Feb 2015

“ If you have wanted near benchmark levels of performance for a fraction of what most benchmark components cost, look no further. ”

Hi-Fi Choice July 2014

Headphone Amplifier & DAC

HA-1



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